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OUR DETACHMENT.

VOL. I.

OUR DETACHMENT.

BY

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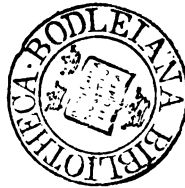
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&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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OUR DETACHMENT.

CHAPTER I.

A SUBALTERN ALONE.

I WAS on duty that day, and couldn't get out, and awfully dull work I found it, leaning out of my window, and trying to catch a glimpse of the town and its inhabitants, over the top of the horrid blank wall that bounded our horizon—in an earthward direction I mean, for, looking upwards, certainly there was plenty of a blue Summer sky to be seen, flecked with white fleecy clouds; but I had seen lots of that kind of thing any day this hot Summer; and though I won't deny it is pretty, still a fellow can't always be star-gazing; or if he is, he is

pretty sure to fall into some desperate grief here below—worse even than the old cove we used to read about in our Grecian history.

Then there were distant mountain tops in view, looking so sunny and heathery and tempting that they were an aggravation rather than a solace—more particularly as I knew that just under them lay a beautiful lake, renowned for its fishing; and that on that very delicious day my captain, Lord Claude Feversham, had gone to inspect it, and try his luck. “At any rate, it’s a bad day for sport,” I mused—“too bright altogether; and I’m glad of it, for it’s a beastly shame to leave me mewed up here alone, and all the other fellows off amusing themselves. I’d bet five bob Mayleigh will be able to tell, when he comes in, the whole history and antecedents of that pretty pair of feet I saw yesterday as we marched into the town. It is too bad, for it was I saw them first, and pointed them out to him, and now he will take all the credit of the discovery to himself.”

“I say, there’s an old hag selling gooseberries just outside the gate. I wonder could I hit her with a bit of plaster off the wall here, and

make her bring me some. They'll be down on me now for barrack damages, I suppose; but Feversham needn't think he can shut up Mad-cap Darrell a whole afternoon alone, in such a confounded dull hole as this, without seeing a little alteration in the place when he comes back. Bravo! that hit her. Now she is looking this way. I say you, Biddy, Peggy, whatever your name is, how do you sell those things?"

"Twopence a quart, your honour, bless your purty face, my little master," answered the old thief with a grin that showed all her toothless gums.

"Confound her impudence!" I thought—"what does she mean by speaking in that way to me, Vivian Darrell, junior ensign in Her Majesty's —th foot." So I answered her stiffly, as I flatter myself I can on occasion.

"Come, I want none of your chaff. Remember, you are addressing an officer in Her Majesty's service, and I'll have you placed under arrest if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head."

"Och! murder, yer honour!" she cried, bobbing a series of curtsies, and crossing herself as she looked up at my window. "Sure it's no

offence I meant, my purty dear, but I thought as you were the Captain's little boy, as I'd heard tell about—him as came down a day or two ago, and got a house in the town, your honour. Sure and I could only see your head and shoulders, dearie, so I couldn't tell if you were bigger nor him. But don't tell the min to take me up, agra, for a purtier dear I never seen, and I've seen a many, being sixty years old next Lady-day. Devil a lie I'm telling you, yer honour."

There the old harridan stood, gazing up with her blear eyes at my window, and though pretending to put up her wares, evidently not with the least intention of moving as long as I would listen. However, her aspersions on my appearance and dignity were more than I could bear, and I made up my mind I would even do without the gooseberries, and the amusement they might have afforded me, rather than by buying them encourage this woman in the belief I was little Ussher; though why men shouldn't eat gooseberries as well as boys of ten or twelve, I couldn't think. Indeed I knew they did, for I had seen our serjeant-major half an hour before

investing in some, which he swallowed skins and all, the beast, if I'm not much mistaken. Indeed, I don't believe I'd have thought of getting them but for his example. So I said with great dignity and severity,

"You may go now, good woman—I shan't take any of your fruit, and you'd better learn to know an officer when you see him, before you come into barracks again."

"Sure now, and didn't your honour call me?" she answered, with the greatest assurance. "And maybe, if you'll not be afther taking the berries, you'll give me the price of a plaister, Captain dear, for the place where your honour hit me with a stone, when I was sitting there beyant."

"I never threw a stone at you, you fool," I cried, angrily. I give you my word the thing she called a stone was a bit of mortar about an inch square, and it hit her on the old rag of a shawl she wore round her shoulders. I don't like to be imposed on, and I would give her the money, in a minute when she chose to recognize me as an officer in Her Majesty's service, only that she asked for it on that plea, so I went on.

"It was only a bit of plaister off the window here struck you; and it is not for your hurt you want it, for you were not hurt, but to get a glass of whiskey, or something. Get along with you out of barracks. Do you think I don't know the whole set of you."

As I spoke I got up from the chair in which I had been sitting, intending to leave the window, and so end the discussion, as there were several of the men hanging about, and they were rather inclined to laugh, I thought. But when the harridan saw me standing up, perceiving by my height, I suppose, that I really was what I had given myself out to be, she uttered a howl, and catching up her basket, hurried off, crying out,

"Holy Mother of Moses, he's coming afther me! Bad luck to ye, ye yellow-skinned, black-eyed spalpeen, that wouldn't give an old body that's sixty come next Lady-day a penny piece to cure the blow you gave her. Faix it's meself believes his mammy doesn't give him money yet, till he gets big enough to take care of it."

This was too much; so, putting my head out of the window again, I called out,

"Hold hard there, you old thief! For the credit of Her Majesty's service, I suppose I'd better give you something; so take that, and get drunk as soon as you like, only don't let me see you in the barracks again, or I'll have you arrested."

Just as I uttered this threat, and threw half-a-crown to her at the same time, who should pass across the square but our Serjeant-Major, and he, overhearing my threat, burst into a most disrespectful laugh.

"Come," I said, turning to him, "let me hear no more of that, Green. Do you think you were sent here to ridicule your officers? I'll let Captain Feversham know how you behave, and we'll see what he says to such conduct. Ah! she's gone now. I say, Green, like a good fellow, don't let her in again. She's an awful old woman, and she'd turn the barracks upside down in no time."

Now perhaps you may think this all very extraordinary, but I'll tell you the whole state of the case, if you will keep it dark; only I don't want the ladies to know, as they would call me a boy, and laugh at me. I am Vivian Darrell, the

only son of Viscount Traverscourt, and you see they made such a piece of work about me at home that I was never allowed to go to school, or any of those places, but always had a tutor. He was a good fellow, too, and was up to a lark, so that we got into no end of scrapes together; when Claude Feversham came to spend last Christmas with us, and advised my going up for my examination for the line, I rather think my parents were not quite sorry to have a chance of a quieter house in future. I passed, as you know, or else I should not be here, and was gazetted to the —th, my cousin Claude's regiment. He is my Captain, and the jolliest brick going; but I wish I had a way of paying him out for leaving me alone like this, our first day in a strange town.

I always tell our fellows I am twenty, and I think they believe it, because I am very dark, which makes a man look older, but this is what I am going to confess, and which I hope you will keep secret—the truth is, I was only eighteen the other day. I begged Claude not to betray me, and though I could not get him to promise, yet I think he will not, and that is the

only thing that keeps me from having my revenge on him, for his beastly selfishness in going off to take his pleasure, and leaving me to take care of the barracks. You see he might tell all about me, if I was to be very hard on him, and I don't think it worth while paying a fellow off, unless I can come down on him well.

We marched into this little country town in the south of Ireland yesterday. I don't go in for praising scenery, you know, it looks spoony, but I don't mind allowing the mountains are very fine, and I am told there is fishing both by lake and river, yachting, shooting, and, for ladies' men, croquet and dancing. I am not a lady's man, you understand. I believe I once had a weakness that way just after I joined, but when I proposed, whilst helping my partner and the object of my admiration to champagne cup at a ball, she answered, with a laugh, "Thank you, but I do find little boys just into jackets so troublesome, and as I have two little brothers of that age to mind, I don't feel equal to undertaking care of a third."

You can imagine what I suffered then, for

really the girl was as pretty as any girl could be, with lots of fair hair like spun glass; after that cruel answer, she went off to dance with a tall, dark fellow in the Blues, she was flirting with, and I heard she married him afterwards. Can you wonder that since then I have hated the sex, and that a constant puzzle to me, whenever I let my thoughts revert to that painful subject, is how she found out my age?—for I had taken good care a few minutes before to tell her I was three and twenty.

As I said, we came in here yesterday. On our way from the terminus to the barracks, I pointed out to Mayleigh a pair of the prettiest feet and ankles possible to see walking a little way in front; but we had not overhauled them when we were obliged to turn up a by-street, and so lost sight of them. Now I know well it is after those feet Mayleigh went out to-day, saying he was just going to see the town and take a stroll, and Feversham has gone out fishing, as I said, and Ussher is somewhere mooning about with his wife, I suppose; the other two fellows said they were going up the lake, and perhaps they did, but they agreed to

come back to lunch, and ordered me to have some for them. Catch me, that's all ! I've had no walk to give me an appetite, so I'll let them wait till I get one. I must have some gooseberries."

"I say, Potter," I cried to a soldier passing, "just run and get me a gallon of gooseberries from that old woman ; but don't tell whom they are for, as I don't wish to encourage her hanging about the barracks."

So he went and bought me the gallon of gooseberries, and for a time I got on very well, having found a note-book of Mayleigh's, which I began illustrating with extracts from his history, calculated to drive him rabid, when he should see all his little weaknesses figuring in highly-finished etchings, and exhibited round the table. As I drew I sucked my fruit, and worked away till my fingers got stiff; even my liking for the dainty before me could not induce me to finish them. What should I do with them? I would not give them to the others, for I was sure they did not deserve them. Stay! I have it! I rushed off to our messman, got a large flat dish, poured what remained on to that, and then proceeded to Feversham's room,

where I concocted, for his benefit, a very cleverly-constructed bed of the apple-pie kind. My tutor had taught me how to make them, with this difference, he had never used a dish of gooseberries as the foundation of his structures. It would have been impossible, when all was finished, to guess there was anything unusual in the bed, and I danced a frantic *pas seul* of delight at the success of my stratagem.

"It wasn't done much too soon, either; for I had hardly returned to my own room again, and resumed my post by the windows, when Mayleigh, Flower, and Preston entered the square all together. They were very busy talking, and did not perceive me until I hit Mayleigh in the eye with a gooseberry skin.

"There is that confounded young monkey Madcap at his tricks again!" said Mayleigh, loud enough for me to hear. "I'll spoil his black little figure-head some day for him, if he doesn't mind?"

"I hope you have not been very dull, Madcap?" called Flower up to me. "I expect the barracks are not the better for being under your care so long. How many fights have

you got up since we went out this morning?"

"Stow that chaff, Flower, will you?" I retorted, sulkily. You see, it is a shame to be always bringing up a fellow's old ignorances against him, and this is what Flower was alluding to :

One day, not long after I had first joined, I had been left alone as I was to-day, and roaming in a very idle frame of mind about the square, I came suddenly on two of the men quarrelling. They were calling each other no end of bad names, and looked mischievous enough; so I said,

"Well, there's no good in you two fellows going on like that; hard words break no bones, and give no satisfaction either, I think; you are so evenly matched at them. Try a round or two, and I'll be umpire."

No sooner said than done; and they were hard at work at it, the little fellow walking well into the bigger one, when who should turn in, right on to us before we saw him coming, but Flower.

"What on earth is all this?" he cried. "Darrell, what's up?"

"Only these two fellows were abusing each other, and I told them to take a turn with their fists whilst I acted umpire."

"You two stop this instant," Flower said, turning very sharp on the men; "and mind, if I hear any more of this, you will be punished. And now, for Heaven's sake, Madcap, come away, and don't let me hear of your doing this kind of thing again; it can't be allowed, indeed, and you will get into awful hot water if you go on in that way."

"Well, I don't see," I answered, "that it is any worse their pommelling themselves a little, and getting all rancour beaten out of them, than to go on calling each other ill names, and keeping up a constant spite."

This is what he was bringing up at me again, and I don't like it; though still, you see, I think I was right. Besides, as I told him then, my tutor always said every Englishman should know how to use his fists, and should use them too, if occasion required. Now, of course, you know, I understand it wouldn't suit the discipline of a regiment, but I don't think he need always be reminding me of the one or

two little mistakes I made on first joining ; indeed, I know he was as bad, for he was always called Baby, and I should like to know which is worst, that name or Madcap ? It riles him uncommon to call him Baby, so I put my head out of the window again, and shouted out, so that the sentry and everyone should hear—

“I say, Baby, did your nurse take good care of you out ? You would have been better, I am sure, in with me, and it would be much more manly than going out in leading-strings.”

“You infernal young monkey, won’t you catch it if I get at you !” roared Flower, coming in hurriedly, for some of the men about were laughing. “I’ll break every bone in your little slippery body, if once I lay hands on you !” As he spoke he turned the key in the lock, so that I might not have the chance of escaping by the door.

Then a frantic chase commenced, which was hard work to him, as I suspect he had always been too good a boy to go robbing orchards and climbing trees for nests, like other fellows, It was a prime lark for me, however, and a good excuse for trying the springs of May-

leigh's arm-chair, which always occupied a comfortable position near the fire; for I had gone down to the ante-room when I saw Flower coming in a rage. Round and round the room we went, without ever, on my part, at least, touching the floor—from chair to table, from table back to chair, and so on, till I saw Flower was getting thoroughly pumped; then, making him a profound bow, I called out, "Good-bye, Baby dear; this sort of thing is too much for your constitution, so I think I had better cut it short. I hope it will have got over its fractiousness by dinner-time;" so saying, I sprang on to the window-sill, and dropped into the courtyard below. It was not much of a drop, about seven or eight feet, but I knew my friend would not follow me. Fortunately I had snatched up my forage-cap as I left my room, so now the world was before me where to choose, and kissing my hand to Flower, who leaned out of the window in a white heat, I dashed out of the barracks and down the steep, dirty hill that led into the town.

It was not a bad place for an Irish country town, and I assure you I was quite astonished

to see how respectable most of the inhabitants looked, my mother having mourned over me as one going amongst cannibals when she heard we were under orders for Ireland. She even wanted me to exchange into the Guards, but that I refused to do, for I should have lost the society of Claude, and with all his faults I like him; besides, I think it is good for him to have somebody always near to look after him. I think him a little inclined to be susceptible, you know, and am convinced my friendly ridicule saved him from making a regular mess of himself once or twice before now. Besides, I told the Mum I wanted to see a little active service, and, if anything happened to me there, I should be nearer home than if I was to go to any other savage country; so, after a good deal of kissing and crying over me, she consented to my going, after making me swear solemnly I would neither get shot nor become so contaminated by bad examples as to shoot anyone myself; and also that under no circumstances whatever would I leave off the flannels, of which she had provided me with a stock, or turn Roman Catholic. As I said, I was as-

tonished to see the respectable look of the inhabitants, and that there were actually two churches, nice-looking ones, too, besides schism shops of various denominations, and plenty of the regular religion of the country also. Why do some of those fellows wear petticoats? It is not a compliment to the old women they resemble, for however well it may suit the old women, it is very unbecoming to them.

There were shops too—grocers and butchers and bakers; fruit shops, where, only that I had already had so many gooseberries that morning, I should have been tempted to spend some money on strawberries, which were really very fine. There were also millinery and tailoring establishments, and at length, just after crossing a second bridge, and remarking that the water in the river was very low, I came on the queerest little hole, and the wonderful variety of articles displayed in the window tempted me to enter.

Such an odd fish as I found in possession! He capered round his counter, bowing and scraping the whole time as he did so; then he

brought forward a chair, placed it before me, and requested me to sit down. This I did, whilst he, returning to his seat behind the counter, offered me some chocolate-cream bonbons, which I was pleased to accept. You see, that is another thing I don't like talked about, but I don't mind telling you—I am awfully fond of sweets, though, before people, I generally pretend I can't bear them—that they spoil one's palate for distinguishing the flavour of wines, olives, and such-like things. I hate olives like poison, you know, but I always eat them when they appear at table; it looks epicurean, and like a *bon-vivant*, who has had his tastes educated at Paris. Mercifully, here in the country they never have them, so I am spared that.

By the way, this queer little wretch I had hunted up was called by the most magnificent name, out of those old histories you know. John Hampden was up over his shop-door, and he assured me everyone called him so. Then you must imagine a person five feet nothing in height, yellow-skinned and dried up, with a whining voice and queer, skipping, hopping,

bustling movements ; a man, I should say, who devoted more of his energies to the collection of gossip than to the business of his trade.

He told me he kept a pass-book with the barracks, and I might get anything I liked. Of course it would all be entered in the book at whatever price he chose to put on the articles afterwards ; but we would not be pressed for payment till the regiment was leaving.

“That is a very convenient way of dealing with gentlemen like the officers,” he went on ; “for, you see, often, young fellows come here not very flush of money, and if they could not get credit they would buy nothing. You are Captain Ussher’s young gentleman, aren’t you, sir ? Would you ask your Papa to favour me with his custom, whenever he wants anything in my line ?”

“I am no connection of Captain Ussher’s,” I answered stiffly, rising and leaving the chocolate creams behind me, so great was my indignation. “I am one of the officers, and if you are not more respectful in your manner of speaking to me in future, I shall be obliged to give up

coming here: it lowers the dignity of the service when its officers are treated with familiarity."

"Oh, surely, sir, you are right," replied the little man, with a face expressive of the deepest concern. My determined conduct had evidently cowed him. "You see, sir, the last regiment was here, sir, they were such nice, friendly gentlemen, and took everything in good part. I used to have great fun with them, and was always up at the barracks; but, you know, I was the only man in Belmurphy they were so friendly with. Everyone's good to John Hampden, however, particularly the ladies; they would not get their things at any other shop in town. Ah! here come the Miss Dashaways. Good morning, ladies;" and then he began the same bowing performance over again, to which he had treated me.

The girls were pretty, certainly, but bad style; one of them tall, with dark hair and a very good complexion; the other dark also, but short, with fine eyes and pretty dark hair; both of them decidedly good-looking, but not the style I care about.

They looked at me for a minute very hard, then turned away and began business with the English patriot, whilst I rose and went out, determined to see more of the town, and mentally registering a vow that I would twist young Ussher's neck for him some day, if his father kept him down here; and how such a mistake could have been made when I was in undress, I could not conceive.

"At any rate," I concluded, "as these fellows cannot recognise an officer in Her Majesty's service when they see him, I will take precious good care never to go out in 'mufti' whilst I am here, except in the evening."

Having taken this resolution, I wandered on, climbed a high green hill on the outskirts of the town, that commanded a most delicious view of the country around, and finally returned to barracks, meeting, on my way back, several pairs of very pretty girls (I've said before that I don't care for the ladies; but it sounds well to comment on beauty, even if you don't know one face from the other); and I arrived just in time to get ready for mess, where I discovered

that Feversham had not yet returned, and that Flower had recovered his wonted good-humour.

CHAPTER II.

A RENCONTRE.

OF course they were all down on me the minute I came in, wanting to know what I had seen and done. I had not much to tell them, as you know; they had found out my friend John Hampden before me, but not the feet. No, to my great gratification, Mayleigh was obliged to own he had failed in all his endeavours to unearth the possessor of that captivating pair of understandings.

And Feversham did not come home till late—not that it mattered much, for I knew I must make up my mind to wait some time before I could see my *ruse* crowned with success. Therefore I was not impatient, when Claude

returned in the highest possible spirits, and evidently greatly amused with his day's sport, though all that he had caught, as far as we could see, was one wretched trout, about two inches long.

We used to mess at half-past six, and it was long after that when Feversham returned; we were able to question him about his day's adventures, as we sat over our wine afterwards. Then his well-pleased air attracted attention, and Mayleigh asked, in his usual inquisitive manner,

"What's up, Captain? You look as pleased as if you had discovered a gold mine."

"So I have," answered Feversham, with his quiet smile, as he passed the decanter before him. "At least, if it is not a gold mine, it is a mine of amusement well worth its weight in gold, in this dull place."

"Tell us all about it," we cried in chorus. "You would not keep such a treasure-trove to yourself."

"You will find it out, my good fellows, in time, even if I tried to keep it ever so dark. It is not a light that will allow itself to be kept under a

bushel, I can assure you." He paused for a moment, and looked round on our attentive faces, with an amused glitter in his dark eyes; then he went on: "You know when I went to Lough Glenty this morning, I had no permission to fish there, which I suppose I ought to have had—however, they told me here in town it belonged to General Bambridge, and that he was not very particular about preserving it. The day was too bright for doing much, but I got out my tackle, set it to rights, and then amused myself admiring the scenery, which is really magnificent. The lake is long and narrow, lying in the centre of a valley, shut in between such steep mountains that a great part of their height is sheer precipice, whilst the lower slopes, though steep enough too, are clothed with woods, that just now are bright with the young Summer green, and scented with thousands of flowers. Mountain torrents dash over the frowning cliffs that overhang the woods, looking like silver streamers, waving in dazzling white against the cold grey limestone, and losing themselves in the woods at the base, through which they glide with a low drowsy

murmur into the lake. Oh! if I was a painter, I could find subjects enough even in that narrow valley to gain me a name; and as I am, having none of the artist faculty, I made more use of my eyes, watching the mountain tops, than looking for the likeliest hole for fish, or gazing in hopes of a bite as I made a cast. So absorbed, I heard no one approach me—indeed it almost seemed to me as if there was no living thing within miles, but the lark singing gaily far up in the blue heavens. Suddenly a soft voice, with a very merry ring in it, exclaimed close to my ear,

“‘Now I wonder who gave you leave to fish here, sir? Have you permission?’

“I turned round with a start, for I felt rather guilty when so questioned; besides I was really taken by surprise. Standing before me was a tall, elegant-looking girl. Her bearing and carriage were most graceful, and I can tell you her face was to match. Not perhaps strictly beautiful, but sparkling—yes, that is the term to apply to it; with large, liquid, dark-blue eyes, pale, clear complexion, and wide smiling mouth, displaying a most perfect set of

teeth. She was dressed in simple serviceable attire, well suited to the country and to the pursuit in which she seemed to be engaged ; yet with an indescribable air of taste and fashion in every fold of her neat get-up. In one hand she carried a light driving-whip, and standing a little way off on the high road was the vehicle she had been charioteering when attracted by my poaching appearance.

“ ‘Come,’ she continued, flourishing her whip, ‘you must get out of this at once. Do you hear? My father does not allow poaching in these waters. And sorry as I am to disturb you from quarters that seem to suit you so exactly, I yet must beg you will retreat, without compelling me to take any more energetic steps in the matter.’

“She drew the lash of the whip through her hand whilst speaking, in a manner that seemed to intimate she could use it, if necessity occurred, and a kind of suppressed merriment glittered in her eyes, as she made this threatening gesture.”

“Well, that is a queer adventure,” burst in Flower, his mouth wide open in intense astonishment, and his whole expression what the French call *ébahi*. “Are all the young ladies in the

country like this specimen, I wonder? If they are, a fellow will have to be cautious how often he dances with them, and be very sure of his ground before he ventures to ask for a flower."

"Which will cut at the root of your little amusements, Baby," went on Claude. "Yes, I advise you to be careful, especially with Miss Bambridge, for, by Jove! she is dangerous in more ways than that one. However, I rose to go as I was told, and was in the act of winding up my line, when the young lady, who remained standing by, as though determined to see the last of me off the ground, again broke silence.

"'You are one of the officers just come with "the army" to Belmurphy, are you not? You are,' she went on, guessing my answer almost before it was spoken. 'Very well, as you have behaved properly, and done as you were told without any demur, I will reward you in a way I am sure you'll like. Come home to lunch with us. I will introduce you to my father, who I am sure will be most happy to give you the permission I denied you, and you shall see my mother, and Clarissa too. Take care of yourself, however, Clary's dangerous.'

"An invitation such as this, and given in so curious and off-hand a manner, I could do no less than accept. A minute or two more, therefore, saw us beside the vehicle, which turned out to be a mail-phaeton, drawn by two fine-looking horses, that I soon saw required plenty of driving, which indeed they got at the hands of my new acquaintance.

"I found them a pleasant family: General Bambridge very fond of field-sports; indeed I may say the same of Mrs. Bambridge, who is a mighty fisher, and I fancy generally has the best filled basket at the end of a day's sport. The dangerous Clarissa was a very pretty girl, with the same odd, brusque, frank manner that distinguished her sister. Her prettiness, as regards mere feature and beauty of colouring, was the greatest, but she did not take me quite as much as my first friend. Altogether they are an original family, very far removed from what one sees generally, and all the more interesting on that account. We were very jolly, and had the merriest conversation, the most sparkling music, and the heartiest laughing I have enjoyed for some time. They hope to

make acquaintance with all of you ere long, and I am sure you will be as charmed with them as I was."

Mayleigh laughed.

"Hard hit, Captain, eh? I didn't think you were the sort to go down so easily, though Madcap will maintain that you are susceptible. I shall begin to believe it now, however."

Claude laughed, and shook his head gaily, with an assumption of indifference that almost imposed on me."

"By Jove!" he went on, "you should have seen that girl's look and manner when she ordered me off!"

"I would rather you had met her than I," I broke in. "I should like to see any woman threatening to turn me off *volens volens*. I would let her know Vivian Darrell is not to be insulted with impunity. Claude, I had thought better of you than to imagine you would allow Her Majesty's uniform to be treated with contempt in your person, and all because the offender had dark blue eyes, a merry smile, a fine figure, and perhaps a heavy hand, forsooth. The last was what mastered you, I know. You did not care

to have that stinging lash laid across your shoulders."

Claude cast a contemptuous glance at me, whilst I thought to myself, "Yes, it is all very fine, now you have the laugh on your side, but wait till to-night, and you will wish you had not annoyed me—that you had allowed the couchant lion to slumber in peace, in fact."

There was a pause, which Claude broke by saying,

"How are the horses after their journey, Madcap?—have you been down to see them lately?"

"I went to look at my own," I replied, "but I did not know whether you would care for me to inspect yours."

"I daresay you are right, and it was better to leave them alone," answered Feversham, with a smile. He was thinking of that time at home when I let out a young four-year-old of his; it took every man in the place six hours hard labour to catch the beggar again, but I assure you his escape was an accident. I would not have done so mischievous a thing on purpose on any account.

I can't sit up late; Claude says, because I am not done growing; though why that should make me so sleepy I cannot understand. This night, even, when I would willingly have stayed up, sleep overpowered me, and I was obliged to turn in long before the Captain thought about such a thing. Never mind, I reflected, I shall hear all about it in the morning, and I daresay I shall come in for squalls, as I am quite sure it will be put down to me. Everything is laid at my door—I am sure I don't know why.

Having settled matters thus in my mind, I was certainly considerably astonished at finding myself taken by the back of the neck, and coolly lifted on to the floor in the middle of the night, whilst the perpetrator of this outrage proceeded to take possession of my comfortable nest. I was so bewildered by sleep and surprise that I could only gasp out,

“I say, what is this for, my good fellow?—and who are you, I should like to know? You will just walk off faster than you came, if you please,” I went on, proceeding to try to roll out the intruder.

"I say, stop that!" shouted Claude Feversham's voice. "You know well why I am here, and all about it. Did you think you were going to make my cot a mess with your horrid gooseberries, and not catch something for it? I sat down on the bed before I knew they were there, so everything is in an awful state, and I am going to sleep here for the night; you can take your own handiwork to sleep in. Good night. I hope you will be wiser next time."

In vain I pulled at him, trying now and then to soften his hard heart by piteous entreaties that he would make a shake-down for himself on the sofa, and leave me my own quarters; he was not to be moved, and pretended to sleep soundly, though I know quite well he was shaking with laughter whenever my pleading was particularly earnest. At last there was nothing for it but that I should take the sofa myself, which I did, mentally registering a vow that my next trick on Feversham should be one which he could not turn against me quite so easily.

I daresay I looked a little foolish—I am sure I felt rather awkward, when next morning the

Captain told at breakfast everything that had happened—all about my beautiful plot, how nicely it had been planned and executed, and finally its ignominious failure. How they all laughed, Flower in especial! I hope they may not get hold of the beginning of the story, all my difficulties about obtaining the fruit, &c.

That afternoon, as I went out for a walk, I met, coming up the hill to the barracks on horseback, Miss Bambridge and her father. The gentleman, no doubt, was going to call on us, but what the lady was up to, I could not quite make out, unless, being exceptional in everything, she had decided to inaugurate a fashion of ladies calling on the officers. Well, I will not be hard on her, for as I passed I heard her say,

“What a nice little boy, papa!—so gentlemanly and good-looking! I wonder who he is?”

“Thanks for your good opinion!” I mentally exclaimed; “but you shall not think me a little boy very long. And she really is very handsome, this Miss Bambridge. I don’t wonder at Claude’s admiring her. It is such a gay, sweet

face, not at all regularly beautiful, but twice as charming for that."

A most unconventional young lady surely, I thought, as, passing the barracks shortly after, I perceived her riding up and down the street, waiting for her father to come out; she did not seem in the least embarrassed as passers-by gazed curiously on her and her horse; indeed I thought I could perceive a saucy, half-triumphant expression in the smile which curved her lips as she looked nonchalantly around. However, I was amusing myself trying to find out the humours of the place, so I did not waste my time looking at her then, but passed on, mentally determined that before long we should be better acquainted.

I had not long to wait either; an hour or two later, as I was returning from a stroll along the country roads, whom should I see riding towards me but Miss Bambridge, and this time alone, her escort having, as I afterwards learned, stopped in town for a game of billiards.

She was riding very slowly, and as I approached she pulled up, leant towards me, and said,

"Look here, boy! Come round and tighten this strap for me; the saddle feels loose, somehow. See if you can girth it better."

I came round accordingly, and found that, as she said, the saddle was very loosely girthed, and I did not think it well put on either. I therefore offered to settle it as it should be, if she would dismount and allow me to arrange everything properly.

No sooner said than done; before I could get round to assist her, she had sprung lightly to the ground, and waited, holding the horse by the head whilst I set matters right. It was not an easy job for me either, as I daresay she saw, for nothing is more tiresome to any one unaccustomed to the work than girthing a side-saddle properly.

I knew how it ought to be done, however—thanks to the long visits Kate Merriton used to pay us at home, she being a first-rate horse-woman, and very particular about her equipments, on which subject she had given me many a lecture.

It was settled at last, and then came what to

many men would have been the most anxious moment of all—namely, the mounting. I had graduated in that too, however—thanks to the same instructress; so when she drew back a little from my proffered assistance, fearing she was too heavy, and that it would be better to lead the horse up to a wall, from which she could seat herself on its back, I said,

“Have no fear; I assure you I can mount you quite easily.”

Without any more demur, she placed a very neat foot in my hand, and, light as a bird, sprang to her seat.

“Are you fond of goodies, my little man?” she asked, as she settled herself and gathered up the reins. “I am sure you must be, so take that and get yourself something nice at the shop on the bridge. Many thanks for the trouble you have taken.”

Before I could utter a word, she tossed me a shilling, and was off and away at a long, slinging trot.

As for me, I stood for a minute or two dumbfounded, wondering what on earth I should do with her money, or whether I should leave

it there for the next passer-by to pick up. Suddenly, however, an idea struck me, and acting on it I took the shilling, tied it carefully in a corner of my handkerchief, and continued my walk home.

They say all men about my age are impressionable, but that they get over impressions easily. I do not know how that may be with others, but of this I am sure : it was not so with me. I was too light-hearted, too mischievous, had, as my comrades said, too much of the monkey in me, to be susceptible ; and though at an age when most young fellows have had some fleeting experiences of the tender passion, I had never as yet cared to look round after the prettiest face or the neatest figure that had ever crossed my path in England's gayest assemblies.

Therefore, when, with a half-mischievous, half-tender idea in my head, I stooped to pick up Miss Bambridge's coin, it never occurred to me I was taking the first step along that road which every man follows at least once in his life. It would have made no difference very likely had I known ; but thus in blissful ignorance of whither I was tending—from the prospect of

such a route I should have shrunk in alarm had I but understood, as one more experienced might—I stepped briskly back to town, murmuring merry snatches of song as I went, and drawing in the balmy Summer air, with a keener enjoyment of its perfumed sweetness than when I left barracks that afternoon. I do not remember seeing any of our fellows when I came in—indeed I believe I went to my room, and occupied myself piercing a hole in the coin tossed to me by Miss Bambridge so short a time before. It did not take long to do, so that, by the time we assembled at mess, the precious piece of silver was suspended round my neck, and hanging near my heart, where I intended it should remain—at least until I knew the donor better, and got an opportunity of showing her to what use her present had been turned.

“What has happened to Madcap since he went out?” exclaimed Mayleigh, suddenly. “I have never known him silent for so long together, or seen him look so grave since he joined. What mischief are you concocting now, pretty one?”

If there is one thing I hate more than another,

it is Mayleigh's odious inquisitive way of asking people questions, whenever he sees they have anything on their minds. I was not in a mood to bear it now, so I answered,

"Stow that, Mayleigh, will you? You are always poking that sharp nose of yours into other people's business, and neglecting your own."

It was not a civil answer certainly, and I fancy if any other subaltern had so spoken to his senior officer, he would have caught fits for it, but by common consent they seemed to have agreed that I should be treated as a spoiled child, and so I gave them plenty of it. It will not do much longer, however—it is high time I should be treated as a man, and I shall insist on being so.

"We had visitors to-day," began Feversham, after a curious look at me, that seemed to say the child is more out of temper now than usual. "General Bambridge,—Miss Bambridge waited outside. Did you see her, Mayleigh?"

"Rather," answered the Lieutenant, dryly. "A proper flirt, I should say, to judge by the way she glanced about her, and the *empressé*

reception she accorded you, Captain, when you went down with her father on leaving."

"Miss Bambridge is a lady, I am sure," I interrupted; "and I think you should refrain from saying anything disparaging about her, Mayleigh, till you have some certain charge to bring against her."

"Whew!" whistled Mayleigh, in long-drawn intonation. "Is the wind in that quarter, eh? I did not know you were acquainted with the lady, or I would have spared her character, out of consideration for your feelings. By Jove! this is a queer thing! Madcap Darrell in love, and with a girl he has never even seen, as I believe."

"Have I not, then?" I asked, with my most impudent air. "I saw her to-day as she rode up, and I don't mind betting a pony I will cut all you fellows out in her favour, bar one, Claude here, who I think has made strong running with her already."

"By Jove! there is a plucky youngster," said Flower. "However, I back Mayleigh to win, for I don't think young ladies are generally partial to boys only just out of the nursery."

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"We shall see," I replied, quietly. "I don't want you to lose your money, Flower, but I fear you won't win mine. What do you say, Captain?"

"That you are more conceited, Madcap, than I gave you credit for. You count too much on the success you have always had amongst your mother's friends. But this is quite different, and you may not find yourself so much the spoiled darling of the boudoirs here as there."

"That is hard of you, Claude," I answered. "I see you have not forgiven me the gooseberries yet. But perhaps you may find me a rival some day, though I know at present you can carry all before you. 'That dear Captain Feversham,' I heard Miss Moneybagg say the other day. 'What beautiful eyes he has! Is it not a pity he's so taken up with flirting Miss Wildman. She will never have him. And it is very sad such a delightful man should break his heart about a girl like her.' By-the-by, I have been intending ever since to ask if Miss Wildman did refuse you? Is it true, old fellow?"

Claude laughed his sly, quizzical smile, and answered slowly,

"It is unfeeling of you, Darrell, to bring up such a subject! A broken-hearted man cannot bear his grief to be lightly spoken of."

"You look broken-hearted! I begin to think it was you who were the flirt, and poor Miss Wildman did not deserve all the blame she got. For shame, Claude! A male flirt is the most despicable of his kind, as I have often heard my aunt, Lady Tabitha, say."

"My dear fellow, don't distress yourself; it was a case of diamond cut diamond. Besides, we poor fellows are often forced to flirt, in self-defence. Never fear, the young ladies are well able to take care of themselves; and I don't think any broken hearts among the other sex can—at least now-a-days—be laid to our charge."

"I don't know that," I answered, more, I must confess, for the sake of contradiction than because I believed a word I was saying; "it seems to me, as far as I have yet studied the female character,—and you know, not going in for ladies' society myself, I occupy the position of looker-on, and therefore see most of the game—it seems to me that women are

not as susceptible as we are—do not give away their hearts at once and on the spot, charmed by some outward attraction ; but, when attention and devotion become marked, they gradually, with many doubts and fears, are drawn into the net from which few afterwards escape. From the very gradual growth of their feelings arises, I think, the main cause of their constancy. Love, slowly ripened and brought to perfection, stands bravely against the storms and hardships of life, whilst that which is sudden and fierce, as that of most men is, fades away quickly, and wears out and changes while yet young.”

“ Well done, youngster !” cried Mayleigh, his wicked eyes sparkling with a satirical meaning that made his ugly face still uglier. “ What a devoted squire of dames you will be ! You see, my ideas on the subject are not so exalted. I agree with Feversham—the pretty creatures are as well able to take care of themselves as we are—yes, and a precious sight better too. As for this Miss Bambridge, take my word for it, Captain, she is dangerous ; let me advise you to keep cool and wary when near her, or you will be brought to book before long.”

“Thanks, Mayleigh ; I think I can take care of myself. I forgot to tell you, they asked us all to go over there to-morrow, for a little croquet. I said we would go ; and now let us take a stroll before it gets dark ; this soft twilight is so inviting.”

CHAPTER III.

THE CROQUET PARTY.

A LOVELY day was the next; not that glaring, overbearing sun that parches up everything and makes all exertion impossible, but a soft, grey day, with glimpses of the sunlight lying on the mountain-tops here and there, and a breeze just enough to lift the hair off heated foreheads, and fan the heightened colour in fair cheeks refreshingly.

We went to General Bambridge's place,—Endley, of course,—and found no one but ourselves had been asked.

“A little quiet croquet, just to make acquaintance and learn to know each other,” explained Miss Bambridge. “A large party is

so stiff, and we should never have become more intimate if you had been lost amongst a crowd." Just then her eye fell upon me. She blushed a little, with a charming expression of the faintest possible shade of embarrassment, mingled with a great deal of amusement, as she held out her hand, saying, "What! are you here? I did not know you belonged to the barracks." Then, in a low tone, she continued, "Forgive me my rudeness, last night; I did not mean any impertinence, being quite in the dark as to who you were."

Feversham and the others would have given their eyes to know what was the meaning of this aside, but I merely smiled at them with my most important air, and stepped back as Miss Bambridge turned to speak to the others.

"Well, little boy, who are you?" asked Miss Clarissa, stopping in front of me, and giving me, for the first time, an opportunity of inspecting her. "You look lost, all alone," she went on, good-naturedly; "come over to the window and tell me all about yourself. You are one of Captain Ussher's children, ain't you?"

"You are mistaken, Miss Bambridge," I re-

plied; "I am an officer in this regiment. My name is Darrell, and I am a cousin of Feversham's. That is about all I know of myself; you, I presume, are Miss Bambridge, Clarissa—whom your sister stigmatised as dangerous to Captain Feversham."

"Did she?" laughed the girl merrily. "Well, and which do you consider the most dangerous of the two? I fancy Gwendoline's fascinations are the most potent, to judge by your Captain's face at this moment. Do you think I could cut her out if I made strong running?"

She asked this question so gaily, with so much carelessness and merry indifference to whatever the answer might be, that, though not a little astonished at such a conversation on first acquaintance, I entered into the spirit of it at once, and replied, "If I were to judge his heart from my own, I should say all other visions would be chased from his mind by the one now present before me; but as I fear, if he were attainable, I should be cast aside, I pray sincerely he may find your sister's attractions the most fatal of the two."

"Well done, Mr. Darrell," she laughed, tossing

her head gaily. "Look now at that ugly little man talking to my mother. Who is he? Mayleigh, did you say? Isn't he like a ferret? I would not care to be a rabbit near him; and see, he does not half like our chatting together here; he is your senior, I suppose, and thinks he ought to be taken more notice of. Then the other young man, who is looking as if he wished papa in Jericho, in order that he might come and join us. Who is he?"

"Oh! that is Flower, he is just above me, and a good fellow enough, but soft. If it was not for me he would be terribly put upon."

She smiled, and looked at me all over as she answered, "Well, you do look sharp enough; see, we are going now out to the garden. You like fruit, don't you? I do, so come along."

I followed her as desired, and in a few minutes we were scattered all over the garden, deep in strawberries, and hiding behind gooseberry trees, gradually separating from each other, till at last I found Miss Bambridge beside me, and Clarissa nowhere to be seen.

"Oh! Mr. Darrell," she said, "how ashamed I am of offering you money yesterday; you

must have been rather amused. But I hope you got the goodies, as I told you?"

"I am ashamed to say I did not," I replied; "but would you like to see what I have done with the money? Mind I would show it to none but you."

"Yes, do let me see," she cried eagerly; "I was so taken aback when I saw you to-day, but as you are not offended it does not matter."

"Here it is," I went on, slowly drawing the precious coin from its hiding-place. "I shall wear it against my heart by night and day, whilst life lasts; and if ever I part with it, I shall no longer be the Vivian Darrell who stood by the roadside looking after you, as you rode away through the soft Summer evening."

"You foolish boy," she laughed, seeing by my manner that, solemn as were the words, the affair was a mere jest, "I hope it may prove a talisman to you, and keep you out of danger; turn away bullets from that susceptible heart in battle, and otherwise reward you for your constancy. But, child, you are too young to be romantic: do let me lecture you a little, and do not be angry with what I say. I do not like to

see so young a boy talking sentiment—it is out of place, and makes him look ridiculous. I like you, and think it is a pity you should spoil yourself in that way, so take my advice and drop it.”

I sulked, or at least would have done so had I thought such a performance manly, and answered, “I am not so young as you think; ask any of our fellows, and they will tell you I am twenty, so I do think I may be as romantic as I have a mind to be. Besides, you know, temptations may be too strong,” and I put as much meaning into my glance, at her and Miss Clarissa, who just then appeared near us, as I could. She laughed and shook her head. “Is it possible you are twenty? Then I forgive you; I took you to be between fourteen and fifteen. I am sorry too, for I can hardly talk in so motherly a strain to one as old as myself.”

“Oh, but pray do!” I begged, eagerly. “That need make no difference, and I like being lectured by you; it makes me feel so good—just as if I was a cat, and you stroked my fur the right way.”

“Poor pussy!” she said, making a motion

with her hand as though she was caressing the animal in question ; " does it like it ? Then it shall have it sometimes, when it is good. And now let us join the others."

We did join the others, as Miss Bambridge suggested, and again she paired off with the Captain, leaving me to the tender mercies of Miss Clarissa. What fun we had that bright Summer day as we walked together to the croquet-ground, and afterwards sat about in groups on the short soft turf, chaffing, talking nonsense, pelting each other with balls of daisies,—and, in fact, doing everything in the world but the thing to do which we had been invited to Endley.

No one so much as looked towards the croquet tools, whilst Miss Clarissa sat enthroned on an old moss-grown stump, like a queen surrounded by her court ; at a little distance apart, Feversham and her sister appeared to lose all consciousness of our presence, in the charms of a very earnest flirtation.

What a girl Clarissa Bambridge was ! I think I can see her now, and can hear her droll and sometimes very startling sallies, her merry peals

of laughter, provoking a response even from innocent Flower, who, as a rule, was more addicted to sentiment than merriment.

How she cut up the oddities of the county notables and imitated their peculiarities!—not ill-naturedly, be it understood, but more, as it seemed, because her sense of the ludicrous was so strong she could not help noticing and remembering traits that would escape others less gifted with the dangerous power of satire. And how pretty she was! The colour, excitement, and high spirits brought to her cheek was like the inside petals of a blush rose, her long blue eyes were positively dazzling under their dark curled lashes, her full red lips took the most charming forms as she uttered her daring sallies, while her slight girlish figure, in its simple white dress, was with every change of her attitude more perfect than before.

In spite of all this, however, and though my eye recognised the beauty of the picture as a boy's eye beauty can recognise while his heart is untouched, my attention wandered incessantly to the pair seated under a wide-spreading beech; their faces were more serious than ours, though

now and then a smile would light up the girl's gravity, till her sweet face seemed so ablaze with merriment, I felt inclined to think the former soberness must have been assumed in deference to her companion, over whose quiet countenance no trace of amusement passed. I was not astonished at this, as I knew Fever-sham's turn of mind was almost always serious, when he could find any one to indulge him in that line; I could see plainly he fancied he had now found a kindred spirit, and was going into the affair over head and ears, as is the fashion of such grave, quiet natures.

It annoyed me a little, I must say, when I saw the case promised seriously. First of all, I knew his mother would be perfectly distracted at the mere thought of such a thing—and really I was aware myself it was not desirable he should marry an Irish girl, no matter how good or beautiful she might be; for what would all his friends in England say to such a thing?—and I, being his cousin, could not but feel with all his other relatives, and decide it would not do.

Whilst I thought thus and watched them, they both rose and came towards us.

“How merry you are here!” cried Gwendoline. I was already calling her so in my mind. “I am perfectly bewildered philosophising with Captain Feversham; finally he has propounded a question I cannot solve without help, so I have brought it over here, in the hope that some of you will assist me. The case is this: suppose you had a friend in trouble of any kind; that you were acquainted with the wrong—if wrong there was—and were questioned about it;—suppose that, in fact, it became necessary in any way—no matter how—that for the good of a friend you should deny the truth, would you do so? Captain Feversham says not; I said I would, if there was no other way. I daresay I might repent and be very sorry afterwards, more particularly if the falsehood did not serve the end I desired; but still, if I saw a friend in dire distress, or with evil, though unknown to himself, impending over him, and knew that a bold and bare-faced lie” (there is no other name for it, she apologised) “from me would save him, I think I should tell it.”

“So would not I,” broke in Miss Clarissa, gaily. “My friend ought to be able to face

and fight his difficulties himself; and it the thing was discovered, what a nasty mess it would get one into, and what a lot of mischief it would do one in the eyes of the world! No, truth pays best, and though I might be sorry for the unlucky individual, I could not help him at that price."

Feversham smiled.

"My reasons for refusing the lie are quite different from yours, Miss Clarissa. It is because truth ennobles and purifies a man, falsehood debases and degrades him, that I would avoid it. I would refuse to speak what I knew that might injure my friend; I would serve him in any other way, even to the death, but I could not tell a falsehood for him; it would leave a stain on my conscience, that, even though unknown to all the world, would be a constant reproach to me before other men. Besides, a falsehood cannot stand alone; it draws others around it, till their name becomes legion. If you did it once, you must either acknowledge your sin afterwards, or go on adding to it day by day, till all that once was

upright in your character had become obscured by the foul sin."

He looked very noble standing there, with his head up, and his eyes fixed on the distant hills, as he preached his stern moral code; and I could see by a side-glance that Gwendoline Bambridge turned her head, and seemed ashamed of the sentiments she had avowed, whilst an unconvinced expression still lingered round her mouth. It was as though she said mentally, "I am sorry I let them know my opinion, but if the case arose I should do it all the same."

Flower and Mayleigh listened silently to the discussion, but evinced no desire to speak; so, after waiting a minute, I broke in.

"You take a very high tone, Claude, and no doubt you are right—for one, at least, who can put a restraint on his feelings strong enough to see trouble come on a beloved head, which he might have averted by the sacrifice of his moral purity in some slight way. To me the end would justify the means, and not only that, but if driven by circumstances to such a resource, I would stand by it—that is to say, if

by so acting I could achieve the welfare of one dear to me."

"Pshaw! You don't know what you are talking of, Madcap," answered Feversham, rather angrily. "I should be sorry to think those were really your ideas on the subject. In a man a keen sense of honour is all-important, and once admit that what is untrue can be right in one place, there is no reason why it should not be correct in all."

"No," broke in Miss Bambridge, "I think you wrong both him and me, Captain Feversham. One could not do it for oneself; that would be cowardice, and therefore even more degrading than the breach of truth by itself would be. But for the sake of one who had been true to you, and whom you had loved and believed in, it would be possible. However, it is no good talking over a hypothetical case; only I agree with Mr. Darrell, and could even see a certain nobility in such conduct in a good cause. Let us have some music; Clary and all of you join in the chorus."

Soon we were gay again, but I could see Feversham was startled and uneasy, keeping

more apart from us than before, and indulging no longer in *têtes-à-tête* with Miss Bambridge. I was very glad of this, for she took me up, and we chatted away as merrily as though we had known each other for years. There was a great deal of similarity between her and her sister, not only in manner, but in style of thought and bias of mind, only I could see that where Clarissa was satirical and inclined to be severe, Gwendoline was pitiful, passing over failings in silence, or making allowance for them. She had the most heart, Miss Clarissa the most cleverness.

It was very pleasant wandering by the lake alone with her, whilst the others followed lazily, their bursts of laughter pealing down to us on the evening breeze, and her low voice talking with the unrestrained confidence of friendship, on every topic we lighted upon.

It may seem strange to you that I, Madcap Darrell, should have cared for this kind of thing; to tell the truth, even whilst I listened to her voice, and followed her ideas with wrapt attention, I wondered now and then, with a curious feeling of anxiety, why I did not

find it slow. If Kate Merriton were to see me now, how she would laugh, I thought; but Kate is a goose, not worth a sensible man's attention, and I really do feel like a man to-night.

So I listened and talked in my turn, sometimes nonsense, sometimes sense; at length she asked me, "Is Lord Feversham generally liked? His ideas are noble, but a little severe at times. Do his brother-officers care for him?"

"There is not a better fellow going than Feversham," I answered, "he is the jolliest, kindest-hearted, most forgiving man in the world. We all delight in him, for he is up to everything; riding, driving, shooting—winning the men's hearts that way, for no one thinks of being jealous of him, he is so unassuming; as to the ladies, they all adore him; his dancing is perfection, I am told, and besides, I do not think he objects to a quiet flirtation. You took him on his sternest side to-day, but don't think the worse of him for that; he is a true friend, and in spite of his talk, I think it would go hardly with him to keep up to his standard, in such a case as you described."

"You don't seem a bad friend yourself," she smiled, looking at me approvingly. "He is your cousin," she went on. "Are you fond of him?"

"Rather," I answered. "I would not go into any other regiment than this, because I wished to be with him. He has such a jolly place near ours, you should see it; such trees, such a river for trout, and no end of deer and things of that kind, such as ladies like. I don't like it as well as Longhurst—that is our place—but it is the next best in the county, indeed I don't think there are many such places in England."

She pumped me pretty well, as I must have known, had I not been too much pleased and flattered by the attention she was paying me, to think of anything else; but let me do her the justice to say, I don't think it was with any mercenary view she cross-questioned me; rather, I think, it was that her fancy was already attracted by my handsome cousin, and she naturally interested herself in all concerning him. Of course it was pleasant to hear he was a rich man, and owner of a fine place, but the mischief was done before then, and she gave

ample proof, in time, of disinterestedness such as I think few women would exhibit.

I see this all now plainly, then I did not, but thought she liked me, at least quite as much as she did him, so that by the time I left that night, I was in a kind of delicious dream, not seeing before me the certain shipwreck of all my hopes, which would have been apparent to any of my comrades, had they but known my thoughts. Yet I was not in love, or at least did not know that I was; all that I understood and felt was that she, a bright, clever, intelligent girl, one whom I knew to be courted and sought after in society, had talked to me, and listened to me, as though I was the equal in mind and experience of the men who flocked around her. She had accepted my decision of a vexed question, as one that appeared to her right and just; she had talked confidentially of their life in the country, had confided to me her opinions on numberless subjects—some grave, some gay, in fact she had treated me as a friend, suited to her in mind and habit of thought, till I felt that ladies' society had a charm of which formerly I had been ignorant, and that the

loveliest, wittiest, most captivating woman I had ever met was Gwendoline Bambridge. I felt that anything she commanded me I could perform, and that to win her approval and commendation, there was nothing I could not attempt. I was very silent during our drive home, hardly hearing the conversation around me, though the others were criticising our late entertainers, and praising the grace and beauty of the young ladies, with an enthusiasm that I must have agreed in, had I listened; though probably I should not have cared to hear them so freely discussed. Feversham, too, was very quiet, putting in a word now and then, generally by way of silencing Mayleigh's biting remarks, but otherwise seeming to be buried in his own thoughts.

"How quiet Madcap is!" cried Mayleigh at length, when, stopped in some ill-natured speech, he sought a fresh object to torment. "Has he fallen head over ears in love with the fair Gwendoline, or have his calf's brains been stolen by the bewitching Clarissa? Poor fellow! What will Lord and Lady Traverscourt say, when they hear the hope of the family is hopelessly in

love with a fast Irish siren? Which is it, Darrell?"

"Come, Mayleigh," I answered, with a strange feeling of firmness rising in my breast, "I don't care what you say about me, or how disagreeable you make yourself, it is natural to you and you can't help it; but I won't have you say anything nasty of the Misses Bambridge. If they are merry, they are ladylike, and have in no way laid themselves under the lash of your censorious tongue."

"Bravo! young one," cried Feversham. "I did not know you could speak like that. I declare you are getting quite a man. Your mother won't know you when you go home again."

I smiled, but did not answer; it was pleasant to hear that even Feversham recognised the change from a boy to man that I felt within myself. I could not help wondering what had caused it, and if he knew; but a secret jealousy of any prying eye discovering what was hidden from myself restrained me from asking his experience to come to my assistance.

Altogether it had been one of the pleasantest

days of my life, and I had jumped off the car at the barracks with a feeling of regret that it was so soon over—regret, however, that did not prevent my locking Mayleigh's room on the outside, and then pushing the key under the door on my way upstairs—a feat which kept that gentleman in a white heat for half an hour, and called forth sundry unseemly execrations; he had not the least idea how it had happened, as I managed the matter during the two minutes he stopped below, talking to the driver, whilst I dashed upstairs two steps at a time, and was in my own room, and half into my smoking costume, before he found out what had happened.

After this we made acquaintance with no end of county notabilities—went to balls, picnics, croquet parties, every kind of device for making country life pass gaily; and wherever we went we met the Bambridges. Besides, we were at their own place very often, and the more we saw of them the greater grew our infatuation. Gwendoline and Claude had become fast friends—not that she ever neglected me either—her greeting was just as hearty and cordial to me as to him. Had it not been so, I

should hardly have dared to build the castles in the air that now occupied all my thoughts, for I could not even think of any person or anything but of her alone. For her, and to be worthy of the favour I thought she bestowed on me, I cast the boy as much away from me as possible, and strove in all things to think and act not only as a man, but as the man should think and act who could hope to win her. My very nature seemed changed—all the volatile impulsiveness and feverish energy of my character turned to a deep, passionate devotion that centred itself on her, and made all other things subservient to her. I cared nothing that Mayleigh and Flower laughed and said, "The young one is desperately hard hit." I did not even pay any attention to the fact that Feversham was striving for the same prize. I knew it was so, but I thought I had as good a chance as he, and I felt as though I could do battle with a brother even in such a cause. Sometimes indeed my hopes would fail me, as I saw her dark eyes turned to Claude's handsome, manly face, and watched, with hate and jealousy gnawing at my heart, their lengthened converse; then my hopes

would spring up at a bound, as, with a ringing laugh and a merry gesture, she would turn towards me and say, "Vivian, come and help me to overwhelm your cousin—he talks dreadful nonsense sometimes, and must be put down."

Then she would tease him, and pet me, till his brow would grow dark and angry, and he would walk away, saying sulkily,

"That young scapegrace will get into trouble some day—he talks too much about what he doesn't understand."

Did she know what she was doing, that dark-eyed, sweet-faced girl? Did she know she was waking a passionate man's heart a world too soon in a young careless breast? Did she know she was sowing distrust and strife between hearts once fondly united? Did she know that the course she was pursuing must end in disappointed hopes and a blighted life, to one at least of those striving for her favour?

Hard questions these to answer, and perhaps the truest solution of them would be that she never thought about them at all, or rather that the boy's devotion seemed to her an absurd and fleeting passion, that would pass away at the

sight of the next pretty face, and transfer itself to a new object. In the meantime he was pleasant and lively, and saw no light in earth or heaven but the brilliance of her eyes. She was flattered, amused too, so she encouraged him, and only noticed the look of pain that would cross his face as she talked to his rival, to soothe it away with a fresh dose of captivation, never considering the day must come when the pain would be permanent, the relief beyond her power to administer. Only Miss Clarissa seemed to pity me sometimes. She would draw me away when she saw me watching, with angry, glowering looks, Feversham and her sister chatting confidentially on the seat under the beech-tree, and, calling me after her, would wander off, wasting her wittiest sallies, and indulging in her most daring satires, in the vain hope of calling up a similar spirit in me.

She was very good to me, though I had before said she had no heart. Now I began to think she must have one, and a pitiful heart, too, else why did she take so much pains to rally me from my idle dream? All her efforts

were vain, however, and she saw they were so. Therefore, one day, as we roamed along by the shore of the lake, Gwendoline and Claude in front, she said,

“Lord Feversham seems to admire Gwen—don’t you think so?”

I was taken by surprise at her putting the question so boldly, though the fact was apparent enough. I stammered and hesitated before replying, then answered,

“Yes, he does admire her. How could he help it? She is very charming!”

I tried to speak calmly, but blushed as only a boy can blush, when speaking of the one dear to his heart for the first time. She glanced at me, and took in all my confusion and my secret, though that, no doubt, she knew well before.

“I think he likes her,” she went on, “and I think Gwen likes him—at least as well as any man she knows. I would not care to be a candidate for her hand, under the circumstances. He is too dangerous a rival. Don’t you think so, Vivian?”

“No,” I answered, with my blood up, for I thought I caught a look thrown back to me

from the subject of our conversation. "He would indeed be a poor-spirited hound who would give up the chase because the struggle was severe, and the antagonist formidable. All the more honour to the one who wins. It is hard for the vanquished too," I muttered, not thinking, however, even then, that would be my lot.

"You understand, of course," Clarissa continued, "our conversation is quite private. Gwen would never forgive me if she thought I had presumed to guess her feelings."

"You may trust me," I answered, thinking, with satisfaction, "It is but a guess, after all, and one she would not like her sister to know." Then the pair in front turned and joined us, I being at once raised to the highest pitch of hope and happiness by the bright looks and pleasant words of her I loved so dearly.

Yet all this while I never acknowledged to myself that I was in love. I was almost too much of a boy still, lived too entirely in the present to form any schemes for the future, or to think of how all this must end; that some day we would be ordered off, and then all our

pleasant intercourse would cease, unless——
But I never went as far as that in my day-dreams,
or surely my eyes would have been opened.

Sometimes, when a jealous pain rose in my heart, as I watched Claude's attentions, and the looks with which they were received, I questioned myself for a minute or two as to what this might mean. Why should she not be pleased at his evident admiration? She smiled equally on me. "Yes," I answered myself; "but I fear she likes him best. If I was only sure her friendship for me was the greater, I would be content."

Foolish boy that I was, cheating myself with the word friendship, and talking of content. What man in love, ay, or boy either, for that matter, was ever satisfied with anything less than full and absolute possession of his idol? And I was not more wise, or less ardent, than others; only my heart was yet untried, and I was ignorant of its depths.

I can see now, looking back through a vista of years, how foolish and absurd this infatuation of mine must have appeared to dispassionate lookers-on—how intensely aggravating it must

have been to my cousin, who, loving her with the love a man should have for the woman he wishes to make his wife, found himself perpetually thwarted and interrupted in his progress in her friendship by a lad of my age; who, however intensely devoted, could not, to the eyes of calm common-sense, hope to succeed. But common-sense is rarely an attribute cultivated by lovers; and while I refused to see that my pursuit was ridiculous, he was equally unable to comfort himself by knowing that it was so; and many a smothered malediction was showered on my head in consequence.

For all this, and though I thought myself so much of a man, and tried to persuade myself I had left all my schoolboy pranks behind me, Flower and Mayleigh often aggravated me with their chaff, till I was driven to make reprisals; and then it was amusing to hear them growling and saying, "that young monkey had been at his pranks again, and they wished Miss Brambridge would teach him better manners."

The mention of that name always sobered me, and I would be profoundly sorry I had been led into any escapade that could give those fellows

an excuse for mentioning her, or talking in their light, joking fashion of her influence over me.

Claude saw, as well as the rest, all that was passing within me. I was inexperienced, and had little worldly wisdom, I could not for my life hide my rapture when she called me to her side, or conceal my jealousy and mortification when my Captain ousted me; but I think that Feversham, even had he not been my rival, would still have tried to keep me from pursuing this will-o'-the-wisp of my imagination.

He knew no more than I did, I really believe, which of us two she liked best; and he was savagely jealous, with a man's cruel, vindictive jealousy; but he knew also better than anyone except myself how young I was, and that, desire it as I might, it would be impossible for me to marry before I came of age. Therefore it seemed to him certain that I stood in his light without any advantage to myself; and one sunny afternoon, meeting me out walking, we both being alone, he turned to accompany me, and began:

"Vivian," he said—and his voice was harsh and stern, as it never used to be in the old days

—“when are you going to cease this folly? Dogging Miss Bambridge like her shadow, spending day after day at their house, and never inquiring whether your presence there is welcome or otherwise. I gave you credit for more good sense, thinking that though you are still but a schoolboy, yet that you had plenty of the keen Traverscourt wit to show you when you were making a fool of yourself. And remember, though Miss Bambridge may amuse herself with you, you are far too young for her ever to think of you in any other light than as a pleasant pastime for idle hours.”

I felt my face glow all over at this speech, reminding me so scornfully of what I felt to be the greatest drawback in my way, and answered hotly,

“I won’t ask if Miss Bambridge is your authority for speaking to me in this way. I know she is pleased to see me every day, and at all hours. As to sense, in what particular is mine worse than yours? If it is wise and right you should admire her, why should it be folly in me to do so? She and I are about the same age, and have, therefore, many ideas and pleasures in

common, and I might as well, and perhaps with quite as much truth, advise you to beware of wearying her. Until I hear from her own lips that my society is irksome to her, I shall continue my visits there. That is my answer, Fever-sham; you can act as you choose."

"Thanks for the permission," he replied, haughtily; "but remember, my fine young fellow, I have been letting you off duty since we have been here—have been indulging you in every way, in fact; that is over now. To-morrow is your day in barracks, and we are going to dine at the Bambridges'."

So saying, with a malicious smile he walked off, leaving me overwhelmed at the intelligence. I should have to stay at home on duty, and he would make as much running as he liked with Gwendoline. The thought made my blood rush wildly through my veins, and I determined, come what might, it should not be as he had planned.

But how to prevent it?—that was the rub; and I walked on thoughtfully mile after mile, turning the matter over in my mind, and trying to arrive at a solution of the difficulty. At last

a plan shaped itself in my brain. I will not say it was a good one—indeed, if carried into execution, it would entirely rest with my commanding officer whether I should get into great trouble about it or not. But I was wild and reckless ; it seemed to me a little matter losing my commission in exchange for one short evening in her society ; and besides, a profession was nothing to me. I, Vivian Darrell, would be wealthier than most of the men around me, and have as good a position, whether I left the army or not. So I made up my mind, and returned to barracks with a defiant, desperate feeling in my heart, and a dash of insolence in my manner whenever I was obliged to address my cousin.

This, however, he would not notice—to do him justice, he was never harsh ; and it must have been a wild spasm of jealousy indeed that induced him to act so unkindly by me in this instance.

Next day I was on duty, as Claude had told me I should be. I moped about the barracks, looked as wretched as I could, and otherwise

tried to conceal the daring defiance that really reigned in my breast.

So the day wore on till about five o'clock. I knew the car for the others was not ordered until six, but I wished to get a start of them before they returned from their walk. I dressed, therefore, and, slipping a top-coat over all, walked quietly off in the direction of Endley by a back road. I had told a car to be in waiting for me about a mile out of town; but, not wishing to arrive too early at my destination, I had ordered it for six o'clock. I had about half an hour to wait, therefore, when I arrived at the appointed place; but the evening was fine and warm, so I sat down by the roadside to rest, the quiet beauty of the scenery soothing the tumult of angry feelings in my breast.

Everything went right; the car came at the appointed time, and I arrived at Endley about a quarter of an hour before the others.

"Why have you come alone?" questioned both the sisters in one breath,— "where are the others?"

"They are coming after," I answered, with a

laugh; "I could not wait any longer; it seems such an age since I have seen you."

"The day before yesterday was the last time we met," laughed Gwendoline; "it is an age, as you say. Why did you not ride over yesterday?"

"I feared to intrude by coming so often," I stammered, but led to speak freely by her manner. "If I thought you wished it I should have been only too happy to come."

"You are always welcome," she replied, with her soft smile. "I'll tell you when I'm tired of you, if that will satisfy you."

"Only I should die if you were to tell me so," I answered, in a low, trembling voice, as I seated myself beside her.

I had never dared to say as much to her before, and now my agitation said a thousand things I could never have found words to utter. I glanced at her face to see how she took it. She had blushed, and there was a slight expression of surprise in her eyes that seemed to say, "You are coming on very fast;" but she answered,

"If you wait for death till then, rest assured

you will live to a ripe old age. Ah! here are the others." And rising, she went forward to meet them.

I knew by Claude's expression that he had seen me, the instant he entered the room, but he said nothing; and as the rest had always been allowed to go out—even when they were on duty—in our quiet country quarters, they thought my presence there was all right.

After dinner, however, and before we joined the ladies, Feversham took me by the arm and drew me towards the window, leaning out of it to cool his heated brow in the balmy Summer twilight.

"Do you know, Vivian," he began gravely, "what you have done? Sometimes I wonder whether it is sheer folly gets you into so many scrapes. Do you know that, if I was to report this last escapade, you would be tried by court-martial for deliberate disobedience of orders?"

"I know it," I answered, with a sullen pride in the admission. "I know you can have me tried, if you please. I counted the cost before I did it. But you don't think I could have sat quietly in barracks, knowing you were here?"

It was more than my blood could stand ; but I am willing to bear any punishment."

Claude looked at me gravely in the dim twilight, and it seemed to me there was a tremor in his voice when at length he answered,

"I can't hurt you, Darrell, and you know it. You acted as I would have done myself; only I wish you had a little more confidence in me. When the time came round I thought the trial was too hard, and went to your room to give you permission to accompany me. You were gone then, however; I guessed whither, and I was right, as I saw at once on entering the drawing-room here. Only be careful, child. Many would not have forgiven such an act of insubordination; and, if anyone else had known the state of the case, I should have been obliged to make an example of you. Don't do so again."

"You are too good to me, Claude," I cried, thoroughly overcome by his kindness, now that I was completely in his power. I had hardened myself to bear angry accusation, and threats of court-martial only too likely to be carried into execution, but this I had never ex-

pected, though it was like Claude, too, and like none but him. Firm as he could be when it was required, there was none who knew better when gentleness might be used; and kindness was more natural to him than severity. "I wish," I continued, passionately, "I could do something to please you—could make some sacrifice that would show how I feel your goodness; but the only sacrifice you would care for I cannot make. It is stronger than I am. You must forgive me still, for, whilst hope remains, I will fight against you."

He smiled a little sadly as he replied, "So be it, then; but let it not breed a quarrel between us. Was there ever woman yet worth a breach between two hearts that had once known and valued each other?"

I interrupted him hotly.

"You do not know what love is if you ask its worth—it cannot be bought or measured. It may prove delusive and false, but while it lasts, the glory, the beauty, the faith with which it surrounds the beloved object are worth more than all the world besides. You who count the

cost, leave her to me, who would do and dare all for her sake."

"This is the first blind, wild adoration of a fresh young heart," he answered. "What a pity that it cannot last!—that as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow over the hill tops the illusion must fade and pass away, never to return in all its first purity and force. Come, let us go to the ladies."

So we joined them, and passed a merry evening. Gwendoline was most impartial in her attentions; whilst Clarissa kept the others fully amused, she being quite equal to entertaining any number of people at once. What a pity such pleasant moments pass away so quickly—we bask as it were in the sun for a few short hours, and then begin again the strife and turmoil and bustle, the conflicting emotions that we call life.

CHAPTER IV.

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

THE days passed on, and still the situation remained unaltered between Feversham and me, with the difference of a slight change in Miss Bambridge's manner towards us. She had been accustomed to be equally friendly, equally sociable, equally mirthful in her manner to both; but latterly there had been a change—a change that had excited my buoyant, sanguine nature to the highest pitch, and that aroused Feversham's deep brooding jealousy more frequently than ever. And the change was this—she avoided him sometimes pointedly, she seemed occasionally ill at ease in his presence, and anxious to escape those *têtes-à-tête* with him that

had at first pleased her apparently so much.

But she never avoided me, she never seemed weary of my society; her eyes would meet mine with the frank upward look that set all my young blood boiling with passionate adoration; and when she most shunned him, then more than ever she sought my society. She and her sister had both taken to calling me Vivian, without any special conversation on the subject, dropping into it in a casual way that flattered me immensely, and made me think it the prettiest name in the world, when I heard it uttered in their soft musical accents. If I had been the man I had flattered myself I had become, I should perhaps have known better how to interpret these signs. I should not have been stirred by them into the wild, feverish exultation, the maddening belief in my eventual success, that took possession of me. Rather, if I had read them aright, might I have known that no woman, not even one so fearless and outspoken as Gwendoline Bambridge, would have shown so clearly her preference for the man she loved; and from all this lavishly-bestowed favour I would have drawn the true

conclusion, that she looked upon me as the boy I was in point of age, and fancied that this devotion of mine would be passing and transient, as boyish passions usually are.

But Feversham was as much deceived as I was—he was too cruelly in earnest to read the real meaning of her newborn shyness and timidity with him. At times still, when they were unavoidably thrown together, she was as kind and friendly and attentive to him as ever—more so even than she was to me, and he knew it. But then again she would shun him, and he would persuade himself either that she loved “the boy” best, or that a mischievous demon of coquetry had possession of her, stirring her up to torment him, and raise the mad devil of jealousy within him, that all his strong self-control could hardly master.

His manner to us both became capricious and variable, at times I know he hated me; I almost think he felt so to her also when deeply stung, but if he did the feeling was transient, and the next minute he would condemn himself savagely for having dared to think harshly of her. She, in her bright happy ignorance of the wild

storm of passion she had raised in two hearts once closely united by friendship, doubtless intended no evil, was not to be blamed for such if it arose, could not, in fact, be judged by the plain, clear laws of conduct, meant to govern people less charming, or more aware of their power. At times he would think leniently of my share in the matter, would acknowledge perhaps that I was not to blame for following this temptation, that had proved too strong for him; and then he would try to show his sorrow for former severity to me, by renewed kindness of look and manner, whenever we came across each other. Sometimes, if he had been fortunate, and she had greeted him with a return of their first friendly intimacy, he would brighten up into his own genial self, feel once more that such a mere lad as I could have no possible chance against him, and would even treat me with a kind of pitying manner, that I, blindly secure, allowed to pass without letting it ruffle my temper.

We were sitting over our wine after mess one evening: Claude was in his joyous temper; he had been out the whole day at Endley, and I

had not been there. Consequently, as I told myself, Gwendoline had been able to give him her attention, and he was happy because it had been so. I was not uneasy or alarmed ; I had told her the day before that I should not be able to see her that day, and she had said she should be sorry, that she should miss me : that was quite enough for me, and I could afford to laugh at my Captain's triumph over me.

I am not much of a wine-drinker ; of course I give my opinion if I hear wine spoken of, and, thanks to hearing people at Longhurst discussing the subject, I can say something very much to the point on most of the ordinary vintages one meets with in this country ; and I think it makes a fellow appear more of a man of the world to know something about the matter. To say the truth, I don't care to support my opinions by drinking much of what I uphold, and so I generally have a good deal of spare time on my hands, as we sit round the table of an evening. They do say in our mess that most of the broken wine-glasses at table are due to me, but this is a calumny, and I hope what I am about to relate will not be taken against me in the

matter, as it was quite an exceptional occurrence, and not my fault, besides. Indeed, as you must have seen, the other fellows put all their scrapes down at my door, so that even in this little country town, where I have lived more quietly than I ever lived before, every one talks of Mr. Darrell as being the most unlucky young gent for getting into scrapes that ever was seen in the country. And that is all Mayleigh's fault, as I will show you presently.

The other fellows were talking all round the table, and passing the decanters now and then before me. I was not minding them, I was very busy trying to execute a trick I had seen Cavenish and some other fellows of "ours" perform, and which I was always rather unfortunate over. The thing seemed simple enough, till one came to try it. It was only this:—fill your glass, pile three or four wine-glasses on it, one on top of another, and then drink your wine without disturbing the balance and arrangement of your fragile column. As I have said, I had never succeeded well with this trick, but on this particular occasion a serene, triumphant feeling that possessed me seemed to have given an unusual

steadiness to my hand, and I really believe I was about to do the trick, and ensure to myself lasting satisfaction from the consciousness of possessing so much skill, when a fragment of biscuit well aimed, and thrown hard, hit the topmost glass, and the next minute my elaborately reared structure was strewed a mass of fragments and splinters over the table.

“Hulloa! young one,” cried Mayleigh’s sneering voice,—and I should have known by his voice, even had I not caught sight of his uplifted hand, that he was the delinquent,—“four broken glasses; six times four is twenty-four; just two dozen glasses you owe our mess. It is a good thing for you you have plenty of money, or this kind of work would soon make a hole in your pocket.”

“You ought to pay for them all, or at least half,” I retorted, raising a rather flushed face, for I was angry. I had long set my heart on accomplishing this trick, and I am sure but for him I should have succeeded on that occasion. Since then I have never again been so much in the vein for that kind of thing. “I would not have broken one,” I continued wrathfully, “but for

you. Not that I mind the expense, or our good motto, 'Who breaks pays,' but that you are always mixing yourself up with other people's business or amusements, and I tell you I won't stand it much longer."

"Why, I thought you were too much of a man now, Madcap, to set your heart on tricks of that kind, or of course I would not have spoiled your little amusement," laughed Mayleigh. "And, besides, it was so jolly to see the glasses tumbling all down about your absorbed face."

"I don't care," I answered, rather more annoyed than mollified at this allusion to my manhood. You see, I looked at the trick as a trial of skill, and not at all as a childish amusement, and I was not inclined to have him poking fun at me, because I thought I saw Feversham laughing. "Look here, Captain," I continued, "don't you think Mayleigh bound to make good half those glasses?"

I knew Mayleigh was a screw, and would not laugh when he found he had to pay for his cock-shot.

"Well, really," said Feversham, laughing, "I suppose if you go into the right of it he is, since

it was he, not you, broke them ; but you looked so tempting a mark, I don't wonder he did not resist the temptation. Flower and Preston were in the act of raising their hands to have a go in at you, when his shot took effect ; so you see he wasn't singular. But come, I have news for you that I received in a letter that arrived just before dinner. Attention, please, till I make the announcement. The authorities have discovered, or think they have discovered, that this is a very disturbed, unsettled neighbourhood, and our head-quarters are to be moved down here. I heard this from Colonel Annesly, so you may be sure it is correct. How will you like that, my boys ? No more shirking duty then, no outing for the officers of the day."

He looked with a smile at me as he spoke, and I answered, defiantly,

"No more unfortunate ensigns kept in out of their turns. All share their duties in proper routine then. Hurrah ! for Colonel Annesly and head-quarters !"

"Confound head-quarters and Horse-Guards, say I, for sending them here," growled Flower and Preston. "A man won't be able to call his

soul his own, once Annesly puts in an appearance. It will be drill, and marching, and pipe-clay, and drill again, etcetera, everlastingly. What has our regiment done, above all other regiments, to be afflicted with such a Colonel?"

"I am sure," added Mayleigh, "Madcap here has done all he can to prevent our being thought a pattern corps, in any respect."

"Oh! never mind Annesly," said Feversham. "I admit he does keep one up to the collar when he is with us, but you know as well as I do he will be getting leave for the partridge shooting presently, and will leave us under Harvey, who is a jolly, easy-going fellow, as we all know."

This was a comforting view of the case, but it would have comforted me much more had I at all been able to fathom the meaning of my cousin's curious and unusual self-content. Content to him meant discontent and pain to me. Clearly he thought he had cause to be pleased with his day, and nothing but Gwendoline having shown him unusual favour would please him, I well knew. What was it that had happened? Long afterwards, when Feversham

Under the magic of that look she was impelled to correct herself, and speak the truth, and she continued, with downcast eyes and a heightened colour; "at least, if I did, it was not because I did not like you."

"Then it was because you did like me," he answered, in a tone of the fullest content, laying his hand for one minute on hers, and then rapidly withdrawing it. He saw she was frightened, uneasy, and he feared to say more just then, for fear of losing his cause from precipitation.

There was silence for a few minutes, Gwendoline looking down into the brown waters of the brook at her feet, apparently studying the outline of the stones, seen clearly through the transparent water, but in reality feeling in every nerve of her body the long, silent, passionate gaze of the man beside her, whose look seemed to pierce into her inmost soul, and there stir up strange feelings, half terror, half rapture, that were altogether new to her; of the possibility of experiencing which she had hitherto been unaware. It was like awakening into a new life, every sense seemed quickened to a

tenfold power and keenness of appreciation, and yet she was as one in a mesmeric trance, unable to resist the will of the mesmeriser. When he spoke at last, in a low, murmuring voice of intense happiness, saying, "What a strange way you have of showing liking—I shall want you to try another plan in future," she felt as if no answer was possible to her, but to turn and look once more into the handsome brown eyes, that were gazing so eagerly at her face.

There was a smile in those eyes as she met them, and she, though still frightened, feeling that she was just passing through a crisis in her life, could not restrain a faint, timid answering smile, a mere ghost of the responsive feeling his look should have called up, but her heart was too full to open freely yet, even to him. She wanted to be alone a little with the happy, the joyful discovery she had just made, before she could disclose its full importance to him, even if he were to question her about it. Happily for her, she thought, he did not; he was inexpressibly contented and satisfied; for awhile every longing of his heart was silent, from pure

happiness, and he lay back among the grass and ferns at her feet, gazing to his heart's content on her beautiful downcast face, and following with enraptured eye the graceful outlines of her perfect figure.

One beautiful hand rested among the ferns close to him. How he cursed, mentally, the well-fitting kid glove that concealed its beauties of shape and colour. What were gloves made for? They were an outrage on good taste, and a mere profanation of nature. He wondered that Gwendoline Bambridge, superior as she was to the rest of her sex in everything, stooped to obey the imperious decrees of fashion in such matters. One as beautiful and perfect as she could surely afford to set fashion at defiance, or lead a fashion of her own. He had not courage to ask her to remove her glove, and might have gazed at the pearl-grey covering with ungratified longing for the rest of the evening, had not a happy idea suddenly struck him. Close by grew a low-growing bush of the dog-rose, profusely covered with pinky-white blossoms. Reaching forward suddenly, he gathered two or three of the prettiest buds, and silent-

ly presented them to her. Equally silently she took them, thanking him with a hurried, timid look, that would have seemed to him much more delightful had it been more prolonged. Then he discovered that a thorn from one of those happy roses had penetrated his finger deeply, sinking below the surface, so that there was no hope that his unaided efforts could get it out.

"What is the matter?" asked Gwendoline, as he moaned a little over it, pretending to suffer severely from it.

"Only a thorn," he replied—"it has got in deep; but if you had a needle or pin, you might get it out for me. I assure you it smarts painfully."

"Let me see," she answered, "I have only the pin of my brooch; but if the operation is not a difficult one, I might manage to do what you want with that."

As she spoke she drew off her gloves, laid them beside her, and took out her brooch. The wounded finger was held out for inspection, was pitied duly, and after a little probing was pronounced to be an incomprehensible case.

"I don't think there is any thorn in it at all,"

said Gwendoline, after a careful investigation. "It seems to me there is the mark of a severe prick—a thorn ran in, and was pulled out again as you withdrew your hand—there is nothing there."

"Do you think so?" asked Feversham, anxiously, bending over to inspect the invalided member more closely, and thereby bringing their two heads into a close proximity, the effect of which was immensely amusing to Clarissa, who, perched on a rock higher up the mountain, was looking down with mischievous delight on the scene below. "I am sure it is still there," he continued discontentedly, as Gwendoline gave signs of being about to give up the search. "Do just look again," he pleaded.

Gwendoline complied, but again without discovering anything. Suddenly looking up, she encountered his eyes fixed upon her—not with the expression of petulant pain he had before assumed, but brimful of a mirthful contentment which at once revealed to her that she was the victim of what Lord Feversham doubtless considered a pious fraud. Colouring a little, with

a half-vexed, half-amused expression, she dropped his hand, saying,

"I don't believe there is a thorn there at all, and you knew it. For shame! I thought you were too honourable, too unblemished, to soil your conscience with a falsehood."

He laughed, but coloured all over his broad, open brow.

"All's fair in love and war," he answered; "but I must acknowledge you have brought my words against me well. What are you looking for?"

"For my gloves. I laid them down somewhere here."

"I have got them," he answered quietly, as though he were announcing the most ordinary everyday occurrence, drawing them out of his pocket as he spoke, stroking them between his hands, and looking at them with a very different expression from that with which he had regarded them ten minutes before.

"Oh! thank you," she said, holding out her hand for them. "I was afraid they were lost. Give them to me."

"Not yet," he replied, putting them again

into his pocket. "You don't want them here; and you might really lose them. I will keep them for you till we are going back to your home."

"But I want to put them on."

"That is exactly what I wish to prevent," he answered with provoking coolness; then they looked at each other again, and Gwendoline did not know whether to be angry or amused. Gradually the expression of Feversham's look changed, and though he had assured himself a few minutes before that the time when he might plead successfully had not yet arrived, and that he must not be precipitate, he now lost all coolness and self-control. Passionate, loving words rushed to his lips, and would next minute have been spoken, when a handful of long tangled grass, neatly fastened round a small stone, fell at their feet, and Clarissa's merry ringing voice was heard exclaiming,

"A good shot, Gwen, wasn't it? I have found my fern, and as it is now getting late, I think we had better set out, if we wish to be in time for dinner."

"Why, what o'clock is it?" asked Gwendoline.

line, nervously, as though she had been caught committing some enormity. In truth, if it was late, she must feel very guilty, for the time had slipped by as though it were but half an hour, and they had not talked so much either. It was those long treacherous silences that had devoured the hours in such an incomprehensible manner.

"Just five o'clock," sang Clarissa, with a most provoking look; while Feversham drew out his watch, and glanced at it, with the air of one who believes all ladies' watches to be wrong, and is confident he will find this particular one wrong too. "We came out at two o'clock," continued Clarissa, "so we have been here very nearly three mortal hours. What you two people could find to talk about all the time, I can't think—indeed, I believe you both went to sleep—or at least Lord Feversham did, and you, Gwen, were afraid to awake him. I would not be as quiet as you are, Gwen, about such things—I would waken up anyone that treated me in that way, I can tell you."

"How would you do it?" asked Feversham, wishing lively Miss Clarissa a hundred miles

away. Gwendoline he knew wanted her gloves, and he could not take them out of his pocket under her sister's eyes, and present them to her. Yet the more he wished for her absence, the more he felt constrained to be polite, and make himself agreeable, and try to act as though he desired her presence. He paused, looking up for an answer to his question, but in reality speculating whether, if Clarissa kept by them the whole way back to Endley, he might carry off the gloves without returning them to their owner. The thought cheered him, and when Clarissa answered gaily, "Try me in that way, and I will soon show you what I would do," he laughed, as though she had said something intensely witty.

"What did I say that was so amusing?" she asked, looking from one to the other with a puzzled, innocent air. Then, seeing Gwendoline was as bewildered as she was herself, she continued, "I don't believe you know what you are laughing at, Lord Feversham. This is levity, which I never encourage. Come, Gwen, he will recover quickly when he finds himself alone;" so saying, Clarissa caught her

sister's hand, and drew her down the narrow path after her, Feversham quickly following, as she had predicted.

In spite of pressing invitations to remain to dinner, Feversham insisted on returning to mess. There were several reasons for this, the principal of which was that he could not hope to have her to himself any more that day, and he had arrived at a stage when, seeing her in company, surrounded by people who prevented private conversation, was more of a penance than a pleasure. Then he was well aware also that he could not trust himself any longer with her alone—he would infallibly say more than at present it was wise he should say, and might fail in obtaining what he desired from over-anxiety to gain it. He was not by any means sure yet that she cared sufficiently for him to ensure him against all chance of a refusal, and, like most men, he was morbidly sensitive on that point. It was true she had that day shown very plainly that she liked him, and he could not doubt that she understood he loved her; but for all that women had been known to lead men on, and refuse them when

they had been certain of success, and he did not care to be one of the number so deceived and deluded.

It was rather a selfish kind of pride—one that he would not perhaps have liked to own to, that most men would feel rather ashamed of, if its true causes and bearing were explained to them, and yet that influences most of them immensely in their dealing with women. It would be a curious study for investigators of such curiosities to ascertain how often, since the fashion of proposal and rejection began, have women been vituperated and censured for having encouraged and thrown over men, when the real impediment to a happy and satisfactory arrangement of the case has been that the man, in his intense dread of refusal, has failed to explain his meaning clearly to the object of his love; wrapping up a plain simple demand for marriage in such enigmatical form as would require an *Œdipus* to unravel.

The woman meanwhile, besides bearing to the man and his fellows the imputation of heartlessness, has had to bear the wearing aching load of hope deferred, to experience the

pangs of a pained wonder, dull at first, but growing every day more keen—as to the reason of the coldness that has sprung up between hearts once so dear to each other. A wonder perhaps doomed never to be satisfied or enlightened—perhaps after long years destined to be relieved, when too late, by the intervention of some common friend, who can throw on trivial words long forgotten some gleam of light gathered from acquaintance with the mind of the man who, once frightened away, can rarely, if ever, be recalled.

Claude Feversham did not think of matters in this light as he drove merrily home, but he did determine to wait a little longer, and make himself more sure of his ground before he ventured on the fatal step. Still matters appeared well for him at present, as he had seen them that day, when that monkey Madcap had not been near to intrude; therefore Feversham had been almost condescending to me when he met me that evening at mess.

Gwendoline Bambridge was sitting alone in her room; she had dressed for dinner, and was absorbed in what seemed to be a pleasant

reverie, while waiting for the gong to sound. Suddenly the door opened, and Clarissa flitted into the room : both these girls were peculiar in their manner of moving and walking about a room. Gwendoline always reminded me of a clipper-ship under press of canvas—she literally sailed along the ground, seeming to me also like a swan, piloting itself gracefully over the clear waters of the lake ; but Clarissa flitted, or flew—it was more the rapid graceful motion of the swallow, intensely swift, with nothing of hurry or exertion discernible ; she was at the door as you looked at her ; the next instant, without your knowing how, she was at your side. They were pretty and distinctive peculiarities, and I had often noticed them, deeming them suggestive and characteristic. In one minute Clarissa had flitted, or skimmed, over to her sister in her rapid, noiseless way, and laying a hand on each of Gwendoline's shoulders, was looking down into her sister's eyes, with her own brimful of fun and merriment.

There was a long pause. Clarissa evidently expected Gwendoline to speak, and Gwendoline remained pertinaciously silent. Isn't it pro-

voking that people always will do exactly what they are not wanted to do ?

"Well?" asked Clarissa at length, seeing that her sister would not initiate the conversation.

"Well!" replied Gwendoline impenetrably.

"Has not our grave and gracious friend proposed this afternoon, Gwen? I am sure I gave him ample time to do it in, and do you know it is slow work fern-hunting alone. I should not have minded, if dear little Vivian had been with me; but then, of course, he would have been miserable at seeing you alone with his cousin. I do wish, Gwen, you would be quick and hook this fish, if you are going to have him, because you draw all the best men in the place, and leave me no chance; if you were married, I should have a little fair play, and begin to do business on my own account. What did he say? Is the matter decided?"

"No," answered Gwendoline, trying to look as if she felt more doleful than was by any means the case. "You know, Clary, I always tell you there is nothing in it; we are not thinking of each other."

“Ha, ha!” laughed Clarissa; “I know very well when you say there’s nothing in it, it is sure to be something very serious for the poor man concerned, and he generally gets his dismissal a few day afterwards. But he should have proposed to-day, when I did everything on purpose;” and leaving her sister, Clarissa walked over to a cheval glass, and began turning herself round and round before it, singing “Why don’t the men propose?”

Satisfied with the arrangement of her skirts, she turned away presently, and continued, “That lover of yours is a very handsome fellow, I admit, but not nearly as good-looking as my little darling Madcap. What eyes that boy has, to be sure! If I were you, I should be in love with him, over head and ears. How can you go in for that sentimental, grave, dignified, long-legged stork? I have never made out what animal he is like, for, though I call him a stork, his face is not like one; but one name’s as good as another. As for dear little Vivian, in spite of his good looks, anyone can see with half an eye he belongs to the monkey tribe. If Mr. Darwin had been acquainted with him, I

could forgive him for his theories respecting the origin of man. By-the-by, I'll ask Vivian if he knows Darwin."

"And he will tell you he does—meaning of course his book. How can you be so absurd, Clarissa?" laughed Gwendoline. "I don't think Vivian like a monkey at all; he is more like a rough Scotch terrier."

"Oh, it is all the same thing; he is a little darling, whatever he is like, and I wish you would throw over the solemn Captain for him. I should like him for myself if I could get him, but failing that, he would make a beautiful brother-in-law. Now I am disgracing myself by my levity, I suppose," she added; "old Mother Batters would tell me so, were she here. What a mercy she is not, or I should never be able to resist the temptation of scandalising her! Ah! there's the gong," and Clarissa, pirouetting two or three times on one toe, vanished suddenly from the room, before Gwendoline had time to get out of her chair.

CHAPTER V.

NEW-COMERS.

A FEW days after Feversham had announced to us at mess the forthcoming arrival of our head-quarters, the little town of Belmurphy was thrown into a most unusual and unprecedented state of excitement by the incoming of what was, to the inhabitants, a real army, and not the puny representation of military pomp and parade they had been accustomed to dignify by that high-sounding title. You would never have believed the town could have contained such crowds of old women, children, and small boys as it poured forth on that occasion. These all put in an appearance at the station, and afterwards accompanied the troops through the

streets, keeping up as best they could, according to their several capacities; the small boys managing best in that line, and varying the monotony of the march by turning wheels, standing on their heads, and such accompaniments to the pomp and circumstance of war as were in vogue in Irish country towns, or were suggested by ready Celtic wit.

I was glad to see some of my old comrades again—not that I had known them very long before being sent down here, but still their faces were familiar. With one of them I had always been friendly; there was one man, whose kindly handsome face I could see beaming on me out of a carriage window before the train drew up in the station; he, next to my cousin Claude, had always been my particular chum in the regiment. In fact, there is no doubt that, in some ways, he was more to me than Claude had ever been, or than it was now likely he ever could be. We were more of an age, had many tastes and ideas in common, which my sterner Captain would have looked upon as childish; in fact we suited each other; that is the shortest way

of putting it, and no other way explains the matter as well.

But Claude had once asked me why Cecil Egerton suited me, and what I saw in him to like; with the provoking manner of things in general, I could, at that minute, think of no reason for my liking, that Claude could not poke a hole in with one word. According to his account, every other fellow was as good as Egerton, and better too; because they had none of his weakness, which I am bound to admit was his great fault.

Claude's questions and cynical criticisms had the effect of making me think a little about character for the rest of that day. I have never studied human nature much, for though some fellow says "The proper study of mankind is man," still the subject appears to me so deep, there is in it such an infinite variety, that I find it comparatively useless to reason from analogy. If I try to classify my observations I meet immediately some one who upsets all my pet theories which I have evolved with much cigar smoke out of my inner consciousness. That is provoking, you know; a fellow does not like

having his theories upset, and I have found that mine begin and end in—smoke.

But these observations of Feversham's did make me think a little on the matter, in spite of my preconceived determination not to lose myself in its depths any more; the result of my thought was, I began to perceive that, as no man can be really a great man who has not firmness—a mental backbone to his character—so also none can be great who has many petty weaknesses, no matter how fine an appearance he present to the world. The little flaws, though hardly perceptible, work themselves through the nobler metal, and prevent it ringing true when struck full and hard in the battle of life.

There is Claude, now. He is as perfect as most men—perhaps, in natural character, as great as a man can be—but he has a flaw that often to me, who know him well, spoils all his really good points. He has firmness, uprightness, candour, generosity, good-nature, and no alloy of the petty vanity that so often spoils good-looking and clever men. But the very strength of his nature causes its defects; he has

no toleration for weakness, no sympathy or pity for those less strong than himself. He will be helpful and kind to them, but he despises them; and contempt, unless exhibited for something in itself base and unworthy, is a mean-
ness.

Cecil Egerton is Claude's opposite in many things. More clever in some ways, even better looking, he is distrustful of himself, and humble always; as generous, as candid, as upright, where he himself is concerned, but more sympathetic, and weak as water in opposing the wishes of those to whom he is attached; like all such gentle, artistic natures, very loving, very impressionable. Perhaps Claude would not speak or think so hardly of him, were he aware of Egerton's history; and did he know how much that timid, vacillating manner is the result of hardship and toil from early childhood—of a precarious living earned with difficulty.

His father and mother had always been poor ever since he remembered them; but they had been well-bred and refined, in spite of poverty. His mother had been disowned by her family,

in consequence of her marriage with Mr. Egerton, who was an artist, a man possessing considerable ability and some genius, which had been almost crushed out of him by the stern hand of necessity, at the time Cecil began to remember him.

He did not know him long, however; when Cecil was ten years old, Mr. Egerton died of over-work and over-anxiety—a combination that has proved fatal to many talented, sensitive men; and then little Cecil and his mother were left to pull on together as best they might, when dependant entirely on the exertions of a feeble, heart-broken woman. But help came to them when they least expected it; and when the burden laid on his mother had become too heavy to be supported by the earth-wearied shoulders, or borne by the toil-worn brain much longer. An elder brother of Mrs. Egerton's, one of those men who had cast her off on the occasion of her marriage, hearing of her husband's death, now came forward, offering to provide for her and the boy in the future.

For her own sake, had she been alone, Mrs. Egerton would have accepted nothing from one

who had allowed her husband to die of want, when he could easily have procured him some employment that would have relieved their poverty ; but for the sake of the child whose interest she was bound not to neglect, she availed herself of the proffered assistance, and tried to school herself to gratitude. Her time was come, however ; pleasures and luxuries arrived too late to one who had worn out her power of living, in stern battle with necessity. Two or three months after she and her son had been established under Mr. Vansittart's roof, she passed away, glad, but for the anguish of parting from her child, to gain the promised rest so long prayed for, so much needed.

It might be thought the boy was too young then to understand much of what was passing, but sorrow is a wonderful sharpener of young wits, and little Cecil comprehended what he had never heard expressed in words : namely, that his uncle Vansittart had hated his dearly loved father, who was gone, that he had let him die without endeavouring to save him, and that his after-attention to his mother and himself had come too late to save her life. He knew that

his uncle entertained no liking for him on account of his resemblance to his dead father, and he hated Mr. Vansittart with an impotent, childish hatred, that was the more bitter because he felt it to be futile and impotent, when he would so gladly have had it active and hurtful. He did not see much of his uncle—he was sent to school immediately after his mother's death, and there he remained,—except when some of his schoolfellows asked him to their homes for the holidays,—from year's end to year's end, until after he was eighteen years of age. Then one day, without any previous warning, he was sent for to appear in the master's room; and he found himself, after the lapse of eight years, standing face to face with his uncle, Roderick Vansittart.

Mr. Vansittart, as he thus came before the eyes of his nephew, now a lad of nearly eighteen years of age, seemed rather a different person from what he had appeared to the boy of ten. Cecil was bound to admit that some of his ideas on the subject had been warped and prejudiced, and that hate had had too much to do with the estimate he had formed of this his only

relative, who had taken no notice of him, and had only helped him to live.

Mr. Vansittart was a tall, spare man, with dark hair, very plentifully sprinkled with grey, and iron-grey whiskers; his cold blue eyes were keen and quick, his forehead was high and narrow, and his thin drawn-in lips gave to a rather large mouth a compressed, trap-like appearance. In dress he was scrupulously neat, always attired in perfectly-fitting, dark-coloured clothes. Ill-natured people had been heard to aver he possessed but one suit, but if that were so, then must that one suit have been made of self-renewing cloth, endowed with perennial youth, for no one ever saw anything shabby upon him. His large white hands were as spare as his body, and were always wonderfully clean and spotless; they furnished him with a favourite object for contemplation, and he was engaged in minutely inspecting them when his nephew entered the room.

Mr. Vansittart's visit was more to Dr. Percival, the school principal, than to the lad, and had for its object to ascertain what progress young Egerton had made in his studies, and

whether he was likely to be a credit to his uncle, and repay him for the money that had been expended on educational purposes.

"If he promises to turn out well," Mr. Vansittart had explained, "I will place him in the Army, and having interest, I will get him pushed on. We have not in our family favoured the military profession, but it has always seemed to me that, with interest, it might turn out a good thing, and a man who rises rapidly in the Army always enjoys a certain consideration amongst outsiders, who may not see how the wires that work the puppets are pulled. There is to be an examination for the line in the course of the next three months; if it is your opinion, Dr. Percival, that Cecil is competent to pass that examination, it would be my wish that he should go up for it."

And in order that this wish should be announced to him, young Egerton had been summoned down from the intense and absorbing labour of composing a poem in Latin verse, that was to be sent in for competition for Dr. Percival's special prize.

Mr. Vansittart did not appear in quite so bad

a light for some days after this announcement. Dr. Percival had expressed his belief that Egerton could not fail to pass, had praised his abilities very highly, and had particularly commended his aptitude for every branch of drawing and design.

"He will make a splendid draughtsman in a few years time, when he has gained a little more knowledge and experience," continued the good doctor, undisturbed by the gathering frown on Mr. Vansittart's brow. "I am always glad to see a young man exhibit such a talent; it keeps him out of mischief, and gives him an object, when otherwise his life would be aimless and desultory."

"It is at the root of all vagabondage and evil-doing!" thundered Mr. Vansittart, startling the doctor out of his prosy platitudes, and the lad out of his dreams of gold and scarlet, cold glittering steel and bullion embroidery. "Art is another name for meanness of every kind, fortune-hunting and dishonesty included."

"It is false!" shouted Cecil, springing from the window, where he had been standing. "My father was an artist, and you know it; it

is his memory you slander when you speak as you spoke just now. Before me you shall never do it, or I will leave you and your hateful benefits, and seek my own livelihood from a world that cannot be more cruel than you."

He stopped speaking, and then the spirit that had borne him up in the moment of excitement failed, and he turned again to the window, resting his head against the panes, that the tears that flowed, in spite of his efforts to keep them back, might not be seen.

Mr. Vansittart had almost quailed under the vehemence of the boy's attack. When he finished speaking and turned away, his uncle with difficulty restrained himself; but Egerton's appearance was very striking; the old man had no heir, and it had struck him that if the boy turned out well, and made a figure in the world, he could not do better than adopt him. It was but natural that the lad at first should not see all the advantages that would accrue to him from strict subservience to all his uncle's moods and whims, and the flash of fiery spirit pleased the old man, as being a suitable thing in one who was to succeed in the Army, make

a figure in the world, and finally inherit the splendid Vansittart property of Beaumanoir, and the Vansittart name. For even the change of name at some future period had already formed part of the old man's scheme.

"Come [here, Cecil," he said, after a few minutes' silence, during which the doctor looked from one to the other nervously. "I was wrong to speak before you as I did just now. My zeal for your future welfare led me astray. I will not allude to the matter again, only let me see no artist tendencies in you, and pass your examination in November."

The frank acknowledgment that he had been in the wrong touched the lad's impressionable heart, he being utterly incapable of conceiving how entirely conventional the expressions of regret had been, how little real meaning there was in them. His uncle was raised to a higher place in his esteem forthwith, and he even began to think his conduct in former days might be pardoned, if Mr. Vansittart should really repent the course he had pursued, as the lad's sanguine heart led him to believe was probable. For Cecil was prone to judge every-

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one by himself, and supposing to be possible what was impossible, namely, that he should knowingly act cruelly or unkindly to anyone, he would have been afterwards overcome with remorse; this exceptional tenderness of conscience the foolish boy believed was common to everyone, as well as to himself.

The examination came, and Cecil passed through it triumphantly, taking a very high place, third on the list, to the intense pride and delight of his uncle, who at once wrote him a very friendly letter, asking him to Beaumanoir, there to pass the time that must elapse before he could be gazetted. Cecil had no other home to which he could go, and he therefore accepted the invitation, his ill feelings towards his relative still further dissipated by the really friendly wording of the note.

But once established at Beaumanoir, old associations, familiar scenes, forgotten incidents recalled, and closer acquaintance with his uncle, revealed sentiments, opinions, and characteristics eminently distasteful to a young and ardent mind, full of poetic and Quixotic fancies; and the old dislike not only returned, but

deepened. Mr. Vansittart was mean, in fact, he was made up of meannesses, and he, judging others by himself, deemed that everyone around him was compounded of the same ingredients. He had a favourite theory that money was everything in the world. He said it represented not only power, influence, fame, all the many mercenary interests of the world, but that it meant also all those closer and more cherished sentiments that men pretend (according to him) to set such store by. It meant, in his reading of the word, honour, truth, friendship, devotion, constancy, love; all that poetic or heroic souls have ever dreamed, was comprised to him in that sordid word. With such a creed, what could the man be? Was it not rather a wonder that he was what he was, that he had not dried up into a miser pure and simple, that he had any feelings left that could prompt him to give his sister's child an education? To him all men were knaves or fools, all women wicked and weak. With a world peopled as he believed it to be around him, it was only a wonder that he had, in himself, kept up the semblance of an outward respectability, and avoided fall-

ing into those glaring sins from which, according to his creed, none were kept, except by a fear of exposure, the result of the hypocrisy he deemed inherent in man.

"I would not trust any man in the world with a woman or gold, or any woman in the world with a man or gold," he said deliberately after dinner, on the night of his nephew's arrival, expounding to him his strange doctrines. "Act as if every man in the world were your enemy, whom you must deceive, and as if every woman were your slave, whom you must cow. They act so towards you, do you pay them in their own coin."

Cecil Egerton looked at his uncle's narrow, cunning face with astonishment.

"I don't know much of the world, I suppose," he said, "but still, perhaps, from having been so long poor, I have seen more than most lads of my age; and though I know we rubbed shoulders with many queer characters in those days, still I never thought them as bad as you say. Indeed, as far as their means went, they were good to me."

"Because they hoped to make something out

of you," Mr. Vansittart answered, with his low, self-contained laugh. "And now, with your youth and inexperience, you will be more exposed to the attacks of sharpeners than ever. Hold faith with no man, as long as you can escape detection, or where detection will not harm you; but if you are found out in any mess, I warn you I will not stand by you. I believe in roguery—we are all rogues—but then I will only have to do with clever ones."

"I have only wit enough to be honest," answered the lad, with his frank laugh. "I had rather be the person deceived than be the deceiver. I hope I may never adopt your creed, sir."

"You will in a little time, boy," replied Mr. Vansittart, laughing quietly to himself; "indeed, I doubt not you practise it now on me, in a mild way, by trying to make yourself out more honest than you are. Well, that is a paying line; a rogue of unimpeachable integrity will fleece more fools to his one brain in a year than six doubtful characters would in ten years. So, if you can act the thing without believing the

cant, the character obliges you to talk, you will do well."

"But it is no cant," cried Cecil earnestly; then, meeting his uncle's cold stare of incredulity, he looked down at his plate and remained silent.

Day by day brought out some trait in the old man's character more and more distasteful to his nephew. The natural result of his views with respect to people in general was that he distrusted everyone, imputing bad motives for the most trivial acts of kindness; young Eger-ton soon found, to his disgust and indignation, that his sweet, obliging temper and ready good-nature had caused him to be branded in Mr. Vansittart's eyes merely as a rather more skilful and successful hypocrite than most men.

After this discovery there was very little more friendliness between them: Cecil trying to show by his manner how little he cared for his uncle's opinion, how independent he was of the mercenary motives imputed to him, and Mr. Vansittart endeavouring, by threats and arguments, to coerce him into the state of mind and feeling for which he believed his nephew

was formed, and which he approved, as one that frequently led to success in life. Two such ill-assorted characters, brought thus into the close proximity of a country house, could not fail either to quarrel or to influence each other very materially. Egerton was not quarrelsome, but he was weak ; he had not sufficient strength of mind and purpose to maintain a steady, silent opposition to the insidious workings of a strong mind over his weaker one, and he would without doubt soon have succumbed, had he not been gazetted to the —th, just two months after he arrived at Beaumanoir.

How delighted he was to receive that long blue, official-looking envelope, marked on the outside On Her Majesty's Service ! It was like an order of release to a long, pent-up prisoner ; he felt as if escaping from the contact of his uncle's vice-imbued mind would be as a breath of air from fresh, heathery mountain tops to the captive long confined in the close air of a dungeon.

His uncle was with him at the breakfast-table, in the long dining-room at Beaumanoir, when

Egerton received the letter. His cheek flushed and his eye sparkled, but he passed over the envelope and its contents without a word. As the old man took the announcement and looked over it, Cecil glanced round the room as though to take the well-remembered furniture that had seen long ago his bitter sorrow, into his confidence about his great joy. The low French window at one end of the room was open, and through the opening came the sweet-scented morning air and the golden gleam of the early sun. Everything looked brighter and more cheerful than it had done an hour before—even his uncle's face was pleasant, he thought, as Mr. Vansittart returned the letter, saying,

“Very good; the —th is a fine corps—a light infantry regiment, and considered rather fast, I believe. There are some good men in it from the neighbourhood around this. By-the-by, you never met any of my neighbours, I think; it doesn't much matter, as the young men, such as Lord Feversham and some others, are in your regiment, and you will meet them there. They will of course pay you attention, knowing you to be my nephew. I should have

liked you to see Longhurst; but it is a very long drive from this—fourteen miles at least. Some people think it almost as fine as Beaumanoir: I can't say I do. I like land lying towards the south—it gets so much more sun. Longhurst lies westward—a pretty aspect of a Summer's evening, but gloomy in Winter; and in England, Winter certainly claims three-fourths of the year. I hope you will remember all I have been telling you when you enter your regiment; in a society of young men like that, the overreaching principle, the desire to make as much as possible out of everyone, is always at work, no matter how skilfully it may be concealed. Don't forget that; and remember, the aggressor always has the best chance: just as the man who tells his story first always makes most way in men's opinions, and often gets a prejudged favourable verdict before the other side of the question has been heard at all."

Cecil looked gloomy; his brilliant ideas and high aspirations were being sadly damped by this view of the companionship he should acquire in exchange for that of his uncle. He had not taken up his uncle's ideas personally,

despised them still, and would have resisted any temptation to act on them; but by dint of constant repetition, he had come to think there might be some truth in them, as regarded others. Already the mischievous doctrines he heard propounded every day began to work. He was angry with himself, however, for having allowed them to acquire any hold of his mind, and he did not choose his uncle to see their effect, therefore he remained silent.

Breakfast over, he roamed out to say farewell for a time to the old place, and the haunts of that brief period of his childhood, when he and his mother had been all in all to each other here. The sun was shining brightly, and the day was soft and warm, though it was only the end of January. It was one of those few days that come sometimes with the beginning of the year, to delude us with the hopes of the near approach of Spring.

Cecil Egerton strode on briskly, stepping out towards the far blue, hazy outline of hills upon the horizon, trying to listen only to the joyful voices in his heart, and not to the dreary calumnies scattered broadcast by his uncle,

over every true and noble feeling of his nature. He was to leave the next day but one, and sincerely did he rejoice at the prospect. Mr. Vansittart had been kind to him in his way, but the young man felt he was expected to do well, to make a name in fact, in order that he might merit this kindness, and that it might be continued to him. If the world was such as his uncle described, it was pretty certain he must go to the wall and be nowhere; for, had he the will, Egerton felt in himself he had not the mental force or strength to be a successful man in the manner in which his uncle desired him to be successful.

He was right there, and more right than he knew himself to be. As soon as he walked into our ante-room, after reporting himself, a few days later, Feversham, looking at him, said to Preston, in an undertone:

"Weak as water, how did he ever find strength of mind enough to pass his exam?"

"I don't see that," answered Preston; "he has an intellectual face. Don't you think so? Look at his brow."

"Follow the line of the jaw and the expres-

sion of the mouth rather, and you will see I am right. Do you observe, he seems perpetually about to speak, and then says nothing?"

"Which is, at least, better than if he spoke with nothing to say," Preston returned, laughing.

"Wait a day or two—he will come to that presently," answered Claude, in a cold tone of disapproval. "No man with that face could keep in any idea, no matter how feeble or futile, that came into his head."

"You are too hard, Feversham. How would you like strangers to judge you so?"

Feversham laughed a contented laugh.

"I despise weakness," he said. "Why can't a man know his mind and act on it? At any rate, no one can laugh at me on that score."

Preston thought not, but he was not going to flatter Feversham, so he did not answer him, but went over to speak to the new-comer, who was looking rather ill at ease, surrounded by a crowd of quizzical subs. He did not mean to do anything, or make fun of him in any way, but sometimes the spirit of mischief gets into young fellows and they cannot help themselves; besides

he was a good deal younger then than he is now. That is quite six years ago. At any rate, however it happened, or whatever tempted him, he began presently to cram Egerton with some wonderful story about the Major, who was a good fellow enough, but eccentric. His anecdote seemed to stir up some recollections in Egerton's mind, for he presently assented to a rather unworthy proposition of Preston's with regard to the Major's character, saying that he had heard things were so in the world, and particularly in the Army; but that, if the case were so, all he could say was, that he thought the Army, and the rest of the world with it, had better be at the bottom of the sea than that men should avow and practise such doctrines.

Preston was a little startled, for he had only been chaffing, and had not imagined anyone could really take him to be in earnest. But, from whatever cause it had happened, he had been believed, and it was evident that the supposition of wickedness such as he had described distressed the new-comer, therefore he could not be a bad fellow.

Rather amused and interested, Preston tried to explain that his story was an allegory, a romance, or whatever he liked to call it.

"Ah!" Egerton said, when Preston had finished his explanation, "then you are one of those who like to take advantage of the ignorance of others."

Preston was struck dumb; the rejoinder had a certain truth about it that gave it a bitter flavour, and yet it was good; something might be learnt from it, he felt at once, though he was too confused at first to know exactly what.

"I did not mean to take advantage of you in any wrong manner," he stammered, hardly knowing what to say; "I only meant to make a little fun."

"And I was stupid enough to take your random assertions literally, and fancy that things were worse here than they really are. I am too matter-of-fact in anything concerning everyday life to understand chaff at present," he continued, pleasantly, "and I have had a bad instructor lately on such subjects, so you must pardon me when I make mistakes, and misunderstand you. I have been told lately that

truth and honour are unknown in the world, that every man's hand is against his neighbour; and though I had not believed such assertions before, yet your account seeming to ratify and endorse that judgment, I began to fear I had been more incredulous than I should have been."

His look and manner, as he answered, were so frank and winning, that Preston forgot the difficulty in which he had just been placed. He saw also that Egerton was just the character who would soon be a prey to Mayleigh's keen, sarcastic wit, and who would be likely to suffer thereby if he was not warned. He answered, therefore :

"If our fellows find you believe all they tell you so easily, they will not explain things to you, but will probably make matters appear worse and worse. Don't believe them, and do not let anything they say bias your conduct, or you will become a perfect weathercock, veering now one way, and now another."

After that they had some more conversation, and every minute Preston was more and more struck by the incongruities his companion's

character presented. He had noble, lofty principles, in which he implicitly believed ; he had the firm desire and purpose to do right, and a naturally sweet, good disposition ; and with all these fine points, an extraordinary weakness of purpose, that allowed him to be swayed from what he knew to be right with every passing word, even if the speaker of that word was a man of whom he knew nothing, or, as I afterwards found, whom he knew to be capable of evil. But I liked him when I joined and came to know him, though I could see Claude Feversham sometimes looking up from his paper to listen to our conversation, when he happened to be in the room ; and as soon as Egerton left, he would rise from his chair impatiently, saying,

“What a fool that fellow is ! How such men are allowed into the Army is a puzzle to me. If he was in the act of cutting down an enemy in a skirmish, and any fellow passing by called out, ‘Let the fellow off,’ he would do it, and perhaps be bowled over by the same man half a minute after. Unstable as water would describe him well.”

I would laugh, Claude's disgust was so extreme, but it did not change the opinion I had formed of Egerton, that he was a nice fellow, and clever in all save that one point, which is, I almost think, an essential, if cleverness, or, more properly speaking, talent, is to bear any fruit. He became a great friend of mine; he suited me very well, for though I rather condemned his weakness, still I found it pleasant to have a companion always obedient to my wishes, and who never offered an opinion of his own in contradiction to one of mine. And this man had now arrived at Belmurphy, and into his sympathetic ear I promised myself I would pour all my hopes and fears as soon as he had got comfortably settled in his new quarters.

I do not think Cecil had ever been in love, but he was of a romantic, poetical turn of mind, that made me often wonder he had not at least fancied himself smitten often before now; at any rate, this tendency to romance made him sympathetic, and I was certain he would listen with interest to all I had to tell him.

And I was right; he listened to my sorrows eagerly and intently, and was inclined to pass

a harsh judgment on Feversham for interfering. He and Feversham were cruelly distrustful of each other. They had never taken to each other or become friends, which to me seemed strange, as they had many tastes in common; and Claude, though always contemptuous on the score of my new chum, admitted that he only wanted a mental backbone to turn out a splendid fellow. Cecil, I think, was afraid of Feversham, feeling his Captain's hardly-concealed contempt, and avoiding him in consequence; always regarding him with a feeling approaching to reverence and awe. Of late they had become better friends, and Claude was always kind to him. None of the other fellows were as intimate friends of mine as this man, though I got on well with all of them. I am afraid this was not due to my own merit, because I know I was often a troublesome monkey; but it had been unanimously agreed that it was no good correcting Madcap; he might steady in time, but until then it would be necessary to put up with him. They were very good to me—much more so than I deserved; and just at this time, not

being at all happy, I am sure I was not pleasant to them very often ; indeed Cecil told me they all wondered what had happened to Madcap, to make him so captious and irritable, particularly with his chum and Captain Claude Feversham.

Cecil soon understood why it was so, but, unless questioned, he was not very talkative, and therefore kept my secret well. I often blamed myself, however, thinking I had been indiscreet in telling him ; fearing that, when he heard conjectures afloat about me, he might perhaps be tempted to say what he knew. My fears were unnecessary, however ; to me Cecil was true as steel.

CHAPTER VI.

CLARISSA'S CONQUEST.

OF all the newcomers to Belmurphy belonging to "ours," the most important personage in the eyes of the neighbourhood, and the one who also ought undoubtedly to have been the most important in our eyes, was Lieutenant-Colonel Dropmore, the officer at that time in command. He was a widower, but, before I joined, his wife and he had been great characters in the regiment. She had been a person of tart, severe disposition, of whom the subs stood greatly in awe, and whom Mayleigh had named one day, in an inspired moment, Acid Drops. The name was a good one, and it stuck; the Colonel, a good-natured fellow himself,

going by the name of Acid Drop's husband, or more generally, for shortness, A. D.'s husband. She, poor soul, had been dead for two years, and though it might be thought such an experience would have cured Dropmore of any fancy towards matrimony, it was now well known that he was very anxious to make a second trial, and generally offered himself to every eligible young lady that appeared upon the scene.

He was a short, stout man, with a handsome, good-humoured face, in which, however, all the indications of a quick, hot temper were visible. Indeed, Acid Drops (the name, though a misnomer, had descended to him) was a very peppy individual, but his fits of passion blew over very quickly.

He and several other of the new-comers were asked to dinner at the Bewleys' the day after they arrived in Belmurphy. We were to follow them later in the evening, and have some dancing. We knew most of our lady friends would be there, and we were quite curious to see which of them all would make an impression on old Drops' susceptible heart. Claude and I had very little doubt who must be the attrac-

tion to everybody, and I am sure both our hearts beat faster at the thought. Claude ought to have been certain enough, as I knew afterwards, but I was entirely in the dark as to the position I occupied, and I fancied it was quite possible our handsome Colonel, in spite of his stumpy figure, and choleric disposition, might prove more attractive than an ensign, so very juvenile as to be constantly mistaken for a boy.

All the same I felt almost inclined to quarrel with old Drops for his bad taste, when I arrived at Bayview next evening, and found him a declared admirer of Miss Clarissa. It was such outrageous stupidity of the man to look at her, when her sister was near. I felt quite angry at first, but presently became very much amused, watching how she managed him, and twisted him round her finger, and laughed at him all the time, without his for one minute suspecting she did not admire him quite as much as he did her.

“He is such fun, that Colonel of yours,” she said to me later in the evening. “He has been telling me all about the late Mrs. Dropmore—

how sincerely he was attached to her, how long they were married, how he lamented her loss, what a good wife she made him, ending by pointing out that a good wife makes a good husband, and *vice versa*. That seemed to be a special point with him, and matrimony is evidently his hobby. You call him Acid Drops, but after the conversation to-night I would recommend you to change his name to Pear Drops, only I am afraid you will be shocked at such a frightful pun."

I laughed.

"I suspect that conversation had serious intentions, Miss Clarissa, and that you will find he designs for you the honour of asking you to be the second Mrs. Drops. It is an honour that has been offered to a good many, so that you will not even have the gratification of thinking you are alone in your glory."

"You provoking boy! Why could not you have left me that illusion. You will rob life of all enchantment to me, if you insist on bringing me behind the scenes, and making me see the rouge and pearl powder on the actors' faces, and the careworn expressions that there take

the place of the fascinating stage smile."

"You talk so feelingly, one would think you were an actress yourself," I answered.

"So I am. We are all actors; everyone is. Hamlet discovered that for us a long while ago. But I am more of an actress than most people. It is an irresistible temptation to me to mislead and bamboozle, by seeming to be something different from what I am. No, you need not look frightened. In the first place, you would not be alarmed if I was ever so great a deception; and, in the second place, I never act to you. You are too much of a friend for me to find any amusement in wearing the mask with you; but with Colonel Drops it is different, and I intend to make him give me a little amusement."

"Don't be too hard on him, Miss Clarissa," I said; "he is such a good old fellow, though a trifle hot at times. I should be sorry if you hit him hard—and you know you do sometimes."

"Poor little thing! has it felt the truth of that remark?" she said, laughing. "If it was hit hard, it was not by me; and unfortunately in this warfare it is only the hand that strikes the

blow that can cure. Dear me, what a queer place the world is! I wonder shall I ever feel inclined to heal any wound I make?"

"Heal old Drops," I answered; "it would be such fun to have you at the head of the regiment, for you would make a first-rate Coloneless, and we should all think it unutterably jolly."

"Yes, and call me Clarified Drops, I suppose?" she cried, laughing. "Thank you—you are all too kind; but though I feel extremely grateful, I fear I must decline such a glorious destiny. Have you been dancing with Gwen to-night? Doesn't she look handsome now?"

I followed the direction of her eyes, and saw Gwendoline Bambridge leaning back in a low chair talking to Claude, who sat on the end of a sofa quite close to her. She was indeed looking splendidly handsome, and unutterably happy. If I had not been an infatuated fool, I should have known the truth then; as it was, for a few short minutes I guessed it, and a dull, cold pain took possession of me, making the lights seem pale and dim, the music sound faint and distant, and even the merry voice of my companion lose its silvery tone. Has anyone,

in a moment of supreme pain, the power to grasp and realise his anguish? I think not; and I believe that it is so arranged by wise and merciful dispensation; afterwards, when the shock is over and the mind begins to recover its force, we know where the wound has penetrated, and can tell how and why we suffer pain, and what the intensity of our suffering is; but at first we know nothing of all this, and cannot even frame words to express our feeling, can only moan and writhe, and rebel inarticulately against our misery, like the dumb beasts, with whom we have more affinity in suffering than in joy.

But as I stood like one stunned beside Clarissa Bambridge, and watched with a fixed stare, the intensity and direction of which was beyond my control, the couple at the other side of the room, Gwendoline looked over at me, smiled, and signed to me to come to her. The painful deadness that had taken possession of me was banished by that look. I heard the merry measure of the galop we had been dancing still ringing out through the ball-room; so, passing my arm round Clarissa's waist, we took a few

turns round the room and stopped near her sister.

"You wanted me?" I asked, stopping at length beside Gwendoline Bambridge, and waiting, with my heart in my eyes and ears, for her answer.

"I wanted to ask you when you are going to dance with me. I know," she continued, "that you say I am *passée*, but I never allow anyone to flirt with Clary who does not also pay her dear sister a little attention. So you see what you have to go in for."

She laughed with an intensely mischievous expression, whilst I, utterly miserable and fiercely indignant, answered,

"I never said you were *passée*—I never even thought it, I assure you."

Here I almost choked from the intensity of my feelings; the mere idea of such a term in connection with that bright and beautiful being was sacrilege.

"Oh, it is no good your denying it," she persisted. "I know you said I was *passée*, and that you admired Clary much more than you did

me; but I will forgive you, if you promise to dance the next waltz with me."

"I am engaged for the next," I answered ruefully; "but I don't mind. I will throw her over, if you will promise to tell me who it was who said I had spoken in that way of you."

I was quite ready to speak out then and there, and tell her I regarded her sister Clarissa's beauty as a mere foil to her peerless loveliness, though I knew Clarissa was standing by listening to all this, and with difficulty restraining her desire to laugh; the fear of offending my divinity alone restrained me. Besides I could feel Claude's eye fixed on me with a cold sarcastic expression.

I turned away hurriedly, saying I would be sure and come in time for the next dance; but as I went off with Miss Clarissa, I heard Feversham say, in a cool, clear voice, that I was certain he meant should reach me,

"The young one seems rather off his head at present. Nothing betrays age so much as the style in which a man conducts himself when in love."

I turned and looked at him for one minute—

it was but a minute, but he understood my look; he knew I had detected him in the meanness of trying to make me appear badly in the eyes of the woman we both loved, and he had still sufficient good feeling left to be ashamed of himself. He coloured all over his bronzed face, and bent his head to avoid my gaze, and I passed on, thinking bitterly that Claude was changed indeed to act thus, to stoop to a baseness that, even in my wildest moments, I would not have sullied myself with.

But I forgot all annoyance, all pain, when my dance with Gwendoline came round. She was as kind, as merry, as perfectly friendly as ever, and my poor sore heart was soothed by the magic of her bright smiles, and the caressing tones of her soft voice.

"Who is that tall, handsome young man standing in the doorway?" she asked, presently. "I never saw him before to-night, yet he came with your party. I suppose he is one of the new arrivals. He is very good-looking. Introduce him to me."

I looked in the direction she mentioned, and saw Cecil Egerton leaning against the door-

post, and talking, in his quiet manner, to Miss Graham. Now and then he laughed, as that young lady said something that amused him, and I could tell by the expression of his face he was enjoying himself, but in a way peculiar to him, and very different from our frank, outspoken merriment. He always seemed to me as if he felt things so far down below the surface that, except for his irresolution how to act, one would hardly know whether he had felt them at all. At the minute we looked at him we both could perceive he was labouring under the difficulty of deciding whether he should ask Miss Graham to continue the dance, or whether he should remain there listening to her talk. Fortunately for him the young lady herself decided the matter, for, as she finished speaking, she put her hand on his shoulder, and he whirled her away among the dancers.

"Who is he? Introduce him to me," repeated Miss Bambridge.

"He is Cecil Egerton, an ensign in our regiment, a good bit senior to me. I will introduce him, if you like," I answered, sulkily. It seemed to me as if everything that evening conspired

to annoy me. Why should she want to know him? What business had she to talk of him, and look at him, when she might have talked on subjects more nearly interesting to me, and might have looked at me? I was very savage and very miserable, and began to think all my special friends seemed to have been created for no other purpose than to pain and irritate me. But when the introduction was accomplished, and I saw by Egerton's manner he had no intention of paying particular attention in that quarter, I decided he had no feeling for beauty, and was a kind of outer barbarian, with whom, in spite of his poetic tastes, I could have nothing in common, and with whom it was surprising I could have lived so long on such intimate terms.

What weathercocks we all are, swayed about by every trivial incident, every unexpected look or word! Why, even Claude Feversham, and I myself, were, in matters of feeling, as unstable and fickle as Egerton was in action. And we had presumed to laugh at him. Before the evening was over I had forgotten that Claude was a traitor, that Egerton was soulless and

unfeeling, and that I had almost called Gwendoline a coquette. The thought had tried to take shape in my mind, but I had resisted it; I would not give it place, and finally I drove it forth in triumph. When we set out on our drive home, I remembered nothing but that I had danced three times with Gwendoline, that she had been as kind, and merry, and winning as ever to me, and had laughed a great deal with me over Clarissa's new admirer.

"I shall let Clary keep Colonel Dropmore," she said. "I always make her give up any of her men that I fancy, because, being eldest, I have right of first choice. If Colonel Dropmore was a good catch, it might be worth my while claiming him, but I don't fancy he is. Do you know anything about it, Vivian?"

"If I did I would not tell you," I answered, boldly, looking up in her laughing face. "I will not encourage you in your evil courses; besides, it isn't fair Miss Clarissa should have nobody."

"Most Quixotic Madcap! Clary is well able to take care of herself. But really it is amus-

ing to watch those two. See how Clary is snubbing him."

I did not care to look at them at all, having something much more interesting to me before my eyes; however, I did as I was told, and watched them for a few minutes. As Gwendoline had said, they were too amusing: Old Drops was touchingly devoted, and Clarissa was divided between saucy triumph and approaching boredom. Now and then I could see she struggled valiantly against a yawn, that would come, and then she would turn with a smile to our little Colonel, and say something with a serene expression, that could not have been very serene or placid in its wording, to judge by Dropmore's irritated look. It was evident the fish was hooked, and she was playing him skilfully. I suppose that is how we all look when we are caught, so we may comfort ourselves by thinking that even the wisest men in the world have looked at least once in their lives like helpless fools.

That was a consoling reflection to me, knowing, as I did, that I had probably looked just

as idiotic, very likely more so, several times that evening.

But we were going home, and I was happy ; matters were as doubtful as ever between Gwendoline and me ; yet her manner had given me confidence. One thing, at least, I had determined on, and that was that I would speak to Claude about the way in which I had overheard him allude to me that evening. It was a very foolish resolution on my part, but I was as foolish as most young men in my state of feeling are ; I hoped that shame at being convicted in such a pettiness might make my cousin less pushing and forward in his attentions to Gwendoline in future.

Such a fool's hope ! For an answer to it, I need only have asked myself, would any shame have availed to keep me away from her, if I thought she cared to have me near her ?—and certainly she had given Claude that excuse during the evening. But one always expects one's friends and neighbours to be obedient to laws that one cannot see to be in any way binding on one's self, and I was just as exorbitant in my demands on my cousin's good be-

haviour as we all are usually with regard to those around us.

As Claude was turning into his room, when we arrived at barracks, I followed him.

"I want to speak to you a minute," I said.

"Very well," he answered, with an assumption of indifference that convinced me he knew what was coming. As he spoke, he pulled off his coat, and proceeded to get into his smoking toggery.

"What did you mean by saying to Miss Bambridge that I was off my head to-night? You also hinted very broadly that I was in love: will you explain your meaning?"

"My good Vivian," he replied, laughing, "don't be absurd; you *were* rather off your head when I spoke—angry about something, I think—and all the world sees you are in love, so there was no harm in mentioning that."

"If I am in love," I retorted, "it is nothing to sneer at, let me tell you, and those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. But I will tell you what it is, Feversham, you have no business to monopolise Miss Bambridge in the way you do, and prevent any other fellow

getting near her. I don't believe she likes it."

"And I believe she does," said Claude slowly, with a half smile. "My dear boy, I don't want to pain you, but you are very mad and very foolish. You are too young to think of marriage. I love Miss Bambridge, and I think she cares for me; we understand each other pretty well, and the sooner you give up this hopeless infatuation of yours, the better it will be for you."

"Have you asked her to marry you yet?"

"Well, not exactly, but I think she knows I intend doing so. I am entirely dependent on my mother for means, and must get her consent and approbation before I can marry comfortably. I intend going over to see her in the beginning of September, telling her all about it, and getting her to make me a good allowance; until then I shall say nothing to Miss Bambridge; it is not much more than a month to wait."

"A most prudent and methodical person," I replied, sarcastically. "Love has not upset prudence, and an eye to the main chance, in your mind."

Claude walked up and down the room impatiently.

"Take care, Vivian," he said; "you may try me too far, patient as I am. Love does not prevent my seeing that it would be desirable I should offer my wife as good a home as that to which she is accustomed; but failing to secure that, I should still ask her to take me, because, putting all other matters aside, I have let her know my intentions too plainly to be able to draw off now. Not that I should do so in any case, Vivian; you underrate my feelings very much if you think that possible; but indeed I fancy you are not capable of understanding them, and that I waste my breath talking to you."

"Well, you will at least let me know your success," I urged.

"Certainly, if you wish it," he replied, with a confident laugh. "But don't build up hopes for yourself, Madcap; they will be in vain, and will cause you pain. I believe solemnly Gwendoline cares for me, and will accept me. I think she is kind to you only because you are my cousin."

This was too much for me ; the vanity and conceit of that man, qualities I had never remarked in him before, were becoming unbearable, and I flung out of the room without uttering another word. On my way to my own quarters I met Egerton ; we both had to cross the square to get to my rooms, and being bound in the same direction, we walked over together.

“ Was that the Miss Bambridge about whom you have been talking so much, to whom you introduced me to-night ? ” he asked, as we walked over ; and on my telling him it was, he remarked in his quiet way, “ It is very odd how you fellows get into a state of mind about a girl like that. She is handsome, no doubt, but I don’t see half the things you have discovered in her ; and what is more curious, though there were such a number of pretty faces there to-night, none of them took possession of me in any way calculated to produce the feeling called falling in love. I suppose I am not capable of that kind of thing : something wanting in my mental organisation prevents me from seeing perfection where it does not exist.”

I was provoked with this fellow ; he had been specially honoured by her having asked for him to be introduced to her, and he had the audacity to appear almost bored by the honour.

"I am sure I don't know where you can find anyone nearer perfection," I answered, hotly.

"Perhaps so," he replied ; "but I admire her sister, Miss Clarissa, more. There is no accounting for taste, my good fellow, so don't enter into a particular explanation of why one sister must be handsomer than the other, as I see you are about to do ; but tell me, did you see how old Acid Drops went in for Miss Clarissa ? It was first-rate fun watching them—she played him so skilfully. In the end she got tired, and would have liked to get rid of him, but the impression she had made was too deep, and he would not leave her."

"I saw it," I answered gloomily.

I hated fellows who did admire and run after Gwendoline, and was always seized with an insane longing to do them a mischief ; but I never could bear men who had the bad taste not to admire her—it showed at once they were

stupid louts, and stupid people are intensely irritating to me.

"Here are my quarters," said Cecil, just as I was about to express this feeling. "Will you come in and have a smoke and chat before you turn in?—or are you going straight off?"

"Oh! I am off at once," I answered; and turning away left him, the keen edge of my pleasure in the evening completely blunted by his want of perception and Claude's vanity.

As to that fellow, Egerton—he was sure to suffer for it some day—it was such an absurd thing for him to think that he was not quite as capable of making a fool of himself as any of us. Of course it was only that he had not happened to meet the right person yet, and being always taken up by drawing and painting, for which he displayed remarkable talent, he had not time to waste on foolish flirtations, as most of our young fellows had.

With regard to his artistic abilities, they were wonderful; and though he had had but few lessons, I liked his pictures more than those of many of the swell Academy men. I often asked him why he did not exhibit, and found he had set

himself some absurd standard of perfection that he was to attain before doing so ;—a standard he was never likely to attain, for though his keen perception of the beautiful kept him tolerably straight in the right path, still, in this pursuit, his vacillating nature injured him more than it could have done in any of his ordinary avocations. Everything he did. had to be changed and altered, painted and re-painted dozens of times, the matter generally ending by my taking forcible possession of the canvas, until he was absorbed in something else, when it might be restored to its owner without fear of consequences. His ideal standard, consequently, he would never reach, and there were many beautiful things tossing about his rooms that would have won high praise at any exhibition. He was devoted to sketching, and determined to profit by the beautiful country surrounding Bel-murphy, it promising to afford him ample opportunity for indulging in his favourite pursuit.

Sometimes he would get leave for a day or two and start from barracks in a regular artist's get up—portable easel, knapsack, with paint-box and materials, grey tweed clothes and high felt

hat of the brigand shape, so dear to the artist's soul. Particularly handsome he looked in that attire, the dark felt hat suiting the handsome, melancholy cast of his countenance extremely well.

His uncle, he told me, hated this passion of his, and whenever he was at Beaumanoir he was accustomed to steal off without announcing his departure, and remain away for weeks together, returning as suddenly as he had left. His uncle thought he went up to London to amuse himself, and made no objections to these excursions, which he would have forbidden had he known their innocent object. He was even generous enough to offer the young man money occasionally, saying that young men were accustomed to find their allowances too small, and he wished his nephew to do everything handsomely. Lately he had offered to keep a horse for Cecil : the offer had been accepted, for, though Egerton knew very little of riding, he was fond of it, and found it assisted his sketching trips greatly to be able to go on a quadruped's feet instead of on his own.

I thought of all this as I growled at Egerton's

stupidity that night, and would have wondered that, being an artist, he had not found himself compelled to admire Gwendoline, as one would admire a picture, when I remembered that his particular line was landscape—about portrait-painting he knew nothing. Feeling slightly contemptuous over Egerton's shortcoming, and reflecting that if he did fall in love he would change his mind every day, I dismissed the subject and began to dream of Gwendoline's manner to me, and Feversham's abominable egotism in fancying that it was regard for him prompted that manner.

What will become of the world when men are so vain that they cannot see another fellow's chance is as good, or better than their own? And thinking thus, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

HOSTILITIES.

DAYS passed on, and matters went much as they had done before our reinforcement: that is to say, we fished, and boated, and rode, and drove, and croqueted, and danced, and Egerton mooned about the country roads sketching, and a curious state of affairs sprang up between Claude and myself. It was thus it arose:

Though Claude persisted that he had never yet spoken distinctly to Gwendoline Bambridge, he took upon himself all the monopolising airs of an accepted lover, and was very fond of talking to me about her, and arranging what he would do when they were married, as he seemed to

take it for granted they would be. His choice of a confidant was at least singular; he knew the state of my feelings, and should have spared me—and at least not talked of his success to me, if success it was.

Of this I was not quite sure, but I was beginning to be convinced by his manner. He could never have spoken as he did, had not something passed between them that made him certain of his ground. I was wretchedly unhappy; I listened to Claude's confidences because there was a fascination for me in hearing anything about Gwendoline, even if what I heard was altogether unfavourable to my hopes; I would listen to him moodily, and hate him for talking thus, and myself for being so mean-spirited as to stay and hear what he had to say. Then perhaps half-an-hour afterwards, if I met Gwendoline, she was so friendly and so particularly anxious for my company, that I would forget all Feversham had been telling me, and give myself up to the happiness of the moment. Cecil Egerton himself could not have been a more utterly weak-minded fool than I was at that time, living alternate-

ly on a pinnacle of happiness and in a gulf of gloom and despair.

One thing struck me particularly, and from it, in my inexperience, I drew a favourable augury, when I might have known, had I been older and wiser, that it was the worst sign possible.

Gwendoline now never spoke to me of Claude Feversham, as she had been accustomed to do when we first came to the place—on the contrary, I thought she sometimes avoided mention of him, when she might have been led to allude to him in following a subject. Of course I decided she did not interest herself in him, when in fact it was precisely because her interest in him was great that she kept silence.

Colonel Dropmore had continued his attentions to Clarissa Bambridge. He had explained to her the amount of his income, the settlements he had made on his first wife, and various other little details that showed plainly what his intentions with regard to her were.

She had become alarmed; and from laughing at him, had proceeded to snubbing him regularly, but without much effect. Indeed the poor man

seemed to become more and more in earnest the less hope there appeared to be for him, But Clarissa could not keep him from coming to pay visits; could not keep her people from inviting him; could not altogether avoid his attentions when he was there. And thus it happened that, one day, as the whole party were in the garden, gooseberry-picking (as Clarissa afterwards observed), Colonel Dropmore managed to discover that young lady in an isolated corner, all alone.

"It was very stupid of me to have gone there," she said afterwards, to Gwendoline. "I might have known, with Pear Drops in the place, retirement of any kind was dangerous. But there was a pet plum-tree of mine in that corner, and the plums are just ripe, and I did not think he would find me. That was a mistake, I must confess. He is sharper than I thought. Having found me, he began, in his odious, direct way, to tell me that he had been fascinated by my many charms and virtues, and that he designed me the honour of making me the second Mrs. Dropmore. I can give you no idea of the stilted politeness of his language,

or the exquisite composure with which he awaited his answer, quite convinced it would be all he could wish. I was struck dumb at first, and did not recover myself until he tried to take my hand. Then I drew away and put my hand behind my back, saying, 'Excuse me, Colonel Dropmore, but I don't quite see this matter in the same light as you do. I am convinced, from what you tell me, that you would make a most estimable husband, and I know you are the pink of propriety and consideration, but I have set my heart on something much more unruly and scatter-brained. I could never consent to lead the life of dull decorum that would await me as your wife.'"

"‘I will be as unruly and scatter-brained as you like,’ said the poor old fellow, in answer. ‘Indeed, Miss Clarissa, I am very much in earnest, and I think you have hardly a right to refuse me, after all the encouragement you have given me.’"

"‘I was very angry then,’ continued Clarissa. ‘Fancy my having encouraged him, when I had been snubbing him all along, as hard as I could.

“‘I deny that I have encouraged you,’ I said. ‘I have tried to keep you off, by every means in my power; and if you don’t like what I say to you now, remember you drew it on yourself.’

“Then he got very angry, and told me he knew I was in the habit of keeping a whole lot of young fellows dangling after me, and treating them as I had treated him; but he would put a stop to it, at least in part.

“‘I will keep them up to their work,’ he continued, ‘and not let them go racing off here at every hour of the day. We have had a great deal too little work and too much amusement lately; but that must be altered now.’

“And so I believe it will be,” added Clarissa, with a fresh burst of laughing, “for I was so annoyed at what he said to me that I told him he need never hope to occupy the same place in my regard as his subalterns, who were, most of them, particularly nice young men. He looked so furious then that I got frightened, and ran back to you, Gwendoline. Do you think he will stay to dinner?”

Gwendoline paused in the act of picking a plum, and looked round cautiously to see

that there was no one near, before she answered,

"I don't care about his staying to dinner; indeed I think it would be much better he did not do so. But I hope to goodness he will not be able to prevent our friends coming out to see us; it would be too provoking. I could not exist without seeing Vivian every day."

"In fact, when the —th leave, life will be a burden to you, on his account," retorted Clarissa, slyly. "But how about Lord Feversham—does he come in nowhere? I was inclined to think he had quite as much to do as dear Madcap in mitigating the tedium of your existence."

"Don't be absurd, Clary," answered Gwendoline, laughing. "There are some subjects on which even younger sisters have no right to intrude, if it were only possible to teach them so; but you are a hardened offender. Don't think you will get any information out of me, however."

The Colonel did go, as Clarissa had expected he would; he told General Bambridge there was urgent business awaiting him at barracks,

and he actually hurried away without saying good-bye to the young ladies.

"What have you been doing to Colonel Dropmore, girls?" asked Mrs. Bambridge, noticing this. "It must be your fault, Clarissa, for you were the one he was last seen with."

"Oh! indeed, mamma," laughed Clarissa, gaily, "don't ask me what has taken him away. No one knows what I have gone through the last two weeks, with the defunct Mrs. Dropmore, her settlements, her peculiarities, her devotion, her little touch of spirit, that some ill-natured people called temper, etc. I have lived in hourly terror of being carried off, and made Mrs. Dropmore *nolens volens*, ever since I first met him; and it is such a relief to me when he takes himself off for a while, that I hope no one will mention his name this evening."

We all obeyed her wishes, and I think if old Drops had known how perfectly we enjoyed ourselves that evening without him, his frame of mind, as he drove back to the barracks, would have been even worse than it undoubtedly was. And then he did not smoke, and of course felt all his grievances a great deal the more for

that abstinence. It does soothe a fellow, you know, and is better than drink as a consoler, being less immediately deleterious in its effects, though the doctors do tell us it is quite as certain.

It is all very fine saying the mind is the master of the body; perhaps in very highly organised natures it may be, but with ordinary everyday people, like the majority of us, I maintain that bodily indulgence, if it be indulgence in anything for which you have a very strong liking, deadens, and for a time overmasters mental affliction. The indulgence may be drink, smoking, eating, riding a good horse, boating, or athletics; any of those things, in proportion as you enjoy them, make a fellow feel almost jolly as long as they last, and every time the mind is diverted from its trouble the hold of that trouble is weakened.

But our good old man had no such consolation, and even the slashing pace at which the post-horse took him back to town, lost the power of gratification it might have possessed, from the fact that the animal that showed such a turn of speed was not his own, but only a

wretched hired screw. The Colonel's was not a very noble nature, though a good-natured one, and he was sorely ruffled and annoyed at the manner in which he had been treated. It seemed to him quite impossible that his offer could have been refused, and refused in such a manner. It was all the fault of the crowd of foolish boys that followed the girl about everywhere, and that prevented her from thinking seriously of business ; but he would settle that—he would give those fellows plenty of work now, find them something to do besides flirtation and love-making.

Of course when one has the fixed intention of making one's self disagreeable, it is not at all difficult to find an opportunity for doing so ; and this Colonel Dropmore soon found.

His opportunity occurred in the following way. We were sitting round the table over our wine after mess one evening, a day or two after the Bambridges' party. It was very curious how everyone guessed that Acid Drops had failed in getting a second Mrs. Drops. Miss Clarissa had kept her own counsel, and yet we had all read the secret at once, and knew why

the Colonel was unusually gloomy and taciturn, and why he had not gone near Endley the last two days.

We had been talking of all the dances, and other entertainments we had been at lately, and we had been praising the hospitality of our friends about Belmurphy. Suddenly Feversham looked up from the laborious task of pounding a biscuit into minute fragments, a task that had for some time absorbed all his energies, and said: "It seems to me we ought to do something in return for all their civility. Don't you think we could manage it?"

"What shall it be?" asked several voices.

"A dance, of course," I suggested, boldly; "nothing else gives such general satisfaction. Ask the old fogies to dinner, and it will not only be dull for us, but all the ladies who are really our best friends in Belmurphy will be left out in the cold; give a pic-nic, and we shall have an immensity of trouble, and the midges will eat up the thin-skinned, and the delicate will get their feet wet, and the salt will get into the claret cup, and the wasps into the sweet dishes; but give a dance, and you are all right

—all are safe to enjoy themselves, and it is not nearly so much trouble, either, to make a thing of that kind pass off well.”

“A dance!” cried Mayleigh, joining in, “that will not be much of a return for all the hospitality that has been shown us. We shall have to do something more.”

“Why not give a lot of dances,” suggested Preston languidly, and as if the matter had not much interest for him. He was a sleepy kind of youth, and having shown so much interest in the proceedings, relapsed again into silence.

“That is not a bad idea,” cried Flower: “let us fix a certain night in the week, and give small early hops every time that day comes round. Say, begin at six and end at twelve. That will not entail much dress on the ladies, and people will be more willing to come a distance when they know they can get away early.”

“Bravo! Flower,” echoed from all sides of the table; “you have got an idea there at last. That is the very thing.” A little more talk, and Flower’s plan was decided on. Thursday in every week was chosen as the most suitable

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day ; and Colonel Dropmore not being present, having gone that day to dine with the Graces at Fairleigh, it was arranged that Feversham should tell him what had been settled next day, and get him to consent to their messing at three o'clock, on that particular afternoon every week until further notice.

I don't know that anyone expected old Drops would oppose this plan for our amusement, and you may be very sure we were all much astonished when, next evening at mess, on the project being mooted by Feversham, he negatived it very decidedly.

"Can't have it," he said, in the quick excited manner he had when put out. "Can't hear of it at all. Quite impossible to mess at three o'clock ; couldn't do it, should get dyspepsia and all kinds of horrors. Let me hear no more talk about it, I beg."

"Well, but, Colonel, it is not necessary you should dine at three ; if we younger fellows like to do it, I am sure we could manage to get you a snug comfortable little dinner all to yourself, in some room where we should not interfere

with you." So spoke Claude Feversham, looking rather anxious.

"You young fellows indeed!" growled Dropmore, irritated anew by such an unlucky expression; "I suppose you think no one is young but yourself, and that it is a proof of youth to dine at impossible hours. It is a proof of folly, if you like. And I know very well what my comfortable little dinner would be:—fish cold, soup greasy, chops black and sooty, bad feeding and worse waiting, and no company to make matters pleasanter. No, I will have no folly here, let me tell you."

"We have a right to the mess-room," I called out rather imprudently: "we may dance here if we like."

"I was not addressing you, Mr. Darrell; when I want information I will apply to you for it. Yes," he continued with an ominous chuckle, "the mess-room is yours, and you are welcome to it, much good may it do you; I wish you joy of it, and of your three o'clock dinner."

After this he subsided into a series of suppressed chuckles, which told plainly he was concocting some scheme against our intended

amusement. What his plan was we could not divine, and he kept his own secret; it was very provoking, as naturally we imagined he had devised some way of interfering with us, and yet not seeing any move on his part to prevent our design, we proceeded with our preparations.

Thursday came, and we were just sitting down to dinner, when James the adjutant came in hurriedly; he had been a little late, and we had sat down without waiting for him. "Just listen to this," he cried as he entered. "That old fool Drops has sent me a note, which I received this minute, in which he informs me that he has lent the band to the Robinsons at Glengough, for this evening, and that, as the drive is a long one, they must start at five o'clock."

This was a blow indeed; everybody stopped eating, and looked up with a helpless, dismayed expression on their countenances. I was in a blazing passion; the idea of that old beast thinking he could spoil our fun at the last minute. Never! we would teach him better than that.

Springing on to my chair, I signed to every-

one to be silent, and proceeded to harangue the meeting. It was necessary to be impressive, to stir up those around me to rebellion, and, to effect this object, I knew that I must keep myself cool: this was a hard task, but the cause was worth it—it would be such a glorious victory if we foiled our adversary with his own weapons.

“Gentlemen,” I said with solemnity, seeing every eye fixed on me, more in astonishment, I am bound to admit, than as recognizing me as a leader whom they would be proud to obey—“gentlemen, this is a case of flagrant tyranny, and one that calls for immediate and decisive action. Colonel Dropmore has taken a mean advantage of us; thinks he will at one stroke please his friends and spoil our pleasure. Let us show him that we will not for one moment submit to such an unjust proceeding. He wants the band—that he shall not have; he is welcome to the bandsmen—they are his; let him take them; the instruments are ours—we will keep them. I am afraid he will not find those fellows as conducive to harmony, as he may wish, when they arrive without our consent and support; it

will give him a lesson, I think, and make him take care in future how he promises the band without our leave. As to our dance—don't despair ; I know where we can hire a piano and musicians for to-night. Send the bandsmen, James, by all means ; but with my consent not even a cornet shall go with them."

"Bravo ! Well spoken, young one !" was shouted in chorus, as I jumped down ; "that is the way to do it ! Old Drops will find he made a mistake this time. It will be a little more trouble to us to get the musicians before six ; but that won't matter ; we will have our dance, and perhaps will enjoy it more than the Colonel will enjoy his entertainment."

We carried out our plan ; the bandsmen went to Glenlough minus their instruments, and we had a jolly dance. I cannot say we were all of us quite without misgivings as to what would be Colonel Dropmore's retaliation, but we did not let the thoughts of it interfere with our amusement.

I believe he was absolutely raving when the bandsmen appeared. The bandmaster, as soon as they arrived, had the sense to send in for

him, asking to see him as soon as dinner was over; and on his appearing, handed him a note drawn up by James, and signed by all of us. He stamped, and raged, and swore, and finally, remembering the men were there, told them they might remain at Glenlough for the night. If they went back, those fellows would have the use of them, he reflected.

He then questioned the bandmaster, to know if the preparations for the dance had been continued, once it was known the bandsmen would not be there. The man did not know very well how matters had been arranged, but he had heard something about Mr. Darrell having gone down to the town to look for musicians—or some people of that sort, added the bandmaster, with a lofty contempt for any musical talent not embodied in a regimental band.

“Always that young cub!” growled Colonel Dropmore between his teeth. “He is the fellow that is always knocking about with the Bambridges; and now I suppose he will spend the whole night flirting with Clarissa! Young whelp! I should like to horsewhip him soundly!”

With this remark, uttered so as to be perfect-

ly audible to the men, Colonel Dropmore turned away, and went to break the news to the hostess, that the bandsmen had arrived, but not the band. It was too aggravating; all attempt at dancing had to be given up, as none of the young ladies there present were equal to the task of playing dance music, and there were no musicians attainable at Glenlough, as there had been at Belmurphy.

Our dance, on the contrary, passed off splendidly, and was even kept up a little later than we intended it should be. We issued our invitations for next Thursday before we separated, and retired to rest well pleased with the success of our entertainment.

Next day Colonel Dropmore was moody and silent. He made no mention of the occurrence of the day before, and we did not think it necessary to allude to it in his presence. But we could see he was boiling over with rage, which was all the more dangerous because it was concentrated in a nature where concentration was unusual. Days passed by, and still he made no allusion to what had occurred; and we began to think he was beaten, and was con-

tented to revenge himself by strictness in all the minutiae of barrack life, and in an excessive overdose of drill which he now laid upon us.

But next Wednesday, just as we had begun to congratulate ourselves that no attempt would be made to interfere with our amusement next day, he said at mess,

“I am going to hold a special parade at three o'clock to-morrow, gentlemen. I tell you this that it may not intertere with your dinner hour, which, I believe, falls earlier on Thursday than on any other day of the week.”

We all looked at each other in dismay. It was necessary we should get mess over early, as otherwise the room would not be ready; and it seemed this provoking old villain was determined to prevent our dining at the only hour that would suit. We had been very gay, talking and laughing, a few minutes before; now we all sat silent and annoyed, wondering how we should get over this new difficulty thrown in our way. We could not talk the matter over then, however, and we waited until old Drops had vanished before anyone alluded to the subject; then there was a perfect Babel of voices,

one advising one thing, one another. At length above the clamour rose Claude Feversham's quiet voice, saying,

"It seems to me we should have plenty of time to dine after parade, if we could dine in any room but this; it is only the difficulty of having the room ready in time. That can be arranged, however, I think. We will order dinner at the hotel; those who have to stay in barracks can make shift to dine somewhere, and thus we shall circumvent Drops again. Don't let him know what we are about, or he will keep us longer at work."

This proposal seemed to meet the difficulty, and it was accordingly settled the matter should be thus arranged. Claude and I sauntered down to the hotel at once, to give the proper instructions, and the original arrangements for next day were counter-ordered. It was really great fun, devising how to get round and counteract the old fellow's schemes; one felt as if one was an Indian following a trail, or a detective tracking out a crime. Claude and I laughed over it as we went down the town, and laughed still more at the as-

tonishment of the old lady who kept the hotel when she heard the order. She could not think what was up, and, though no doubt inwardly delighted at a freak that promised to bring her so much custom, was too intensely curious to know the meaning of it to appreciate its benefits fully.

"I have them now," thought Colonel Dropmore next day, when he saw us all assembled on parade at three o'clock. "I will see if they can have things ready in time when I let them go."

And he did keep us a good time indeed, putting us through a whole lot of stupid drill that we knew to the last degree of perfection. We could not satisfy him, however; he growled and scolded, and made us go over things again and again. I think, if the men were aware on whose account they were put through all this business, they must have devoutly wished us all at the bottom of the Red Sea. I caught it particularly heavily; was told I was a negligent, ignorant, brainless officer—a young man who would never make a good soldier, and who had quite mistaken his

profession in coming into the Army. I felt rather indignant at being so rated, but, knowing the old fellow had enough to try his temper, I listened to it all, with as meek an expression as I could assume. Besides, what had more influence with me than anything else was that I knew, in his present state of mind, he would be quite capable of ordering me into close arrest in my own quarters, if he thought I looked disrespectful. So I seemed as doleful as I could, and did my best to please; but we had a hard time of it certainly, until five o'clock, when, thinking we were too late to get over dinner in time for the dance, he let us off.

He was going out that night himself—going to dine somewhere. He was a *bon-vivant*, and very fond of dining out; since our row he had hardly messed with us once. But this time he had not requested the attendance of the band. We of course kept our plans very secret, and said nothing about our wanting it. The Colonel would be gone by six, and, once he was off, we would have it in. There was very little time to go down town to get dinner, but

Claude arranged with me, I being unable to leave barracks that day, that I should play host, and entertain any early comers, until he and the others returned.

Everything went off splendidly. Old Drops cleared out in good time, the band came in as we had arranged, our fellows returned from their dinner just as the first car-load of guests drove up, and we had a very merry and successful evening. An evening that was to me intensely happy, for Gwendoline paid less attention to Claude than she had done for some time past, and the attention she withdrew from him she bestowed on me.

One rather provoking *contretemps* the Colonel did contrive to produce in this way. There was a Mrs. Grace and her daughters, who were great friends of ours. They had intended to come to our dance that evening, but meeting Colonel Dropmore in town during the morning, they happened to mention their intention.

"I think," said old Drops, "you will find that there will be no dance at the barracks to-night. I have been obliged to order an extra parade, that I am afraid will interfere with the arrange-

ments, and prevent the dance coming off."

"I suppose we shall hear from some of the other officers, if it is not to take place?" said Miss Grace, inquiringly. She knew the Colonel had not been at the last dance, and fancied, therefore, that very likely he knew little about the matter.

"I don't know how that will be," replied Colonel Dropmore, "but I am pretty sure there will be no dance. In fact, I do not see how there can be."

That was decisive enough, and the Graces did not appear that evening at our festivities—a great disappointment to some of the party, who looked out for them anxiously, until it was too late for any further hope.

They were dreadfully annoyed next day when they heard that the dance had taken place, and it was a long time before the Colonel was forgiven for what was certainly an unintentional deception on his part. As to old Drops himself, he was rather astonished when he found that, in spite of all he could do, we had carried out our plan; and what irritated him most in it was that the Bambridges were con-

stant attendants at our entertainments, and that Miss Clarissa had a number of admirers, whom she treated with much more favour than she had ever treated him. He could keep us all much harder at work, and prevent us from getting out as much as we used to do, but he could not prevent the young ladies coming to our hops, nor prevent us giving them, and he began to feel himself beaten. He kept up the three o'clock parade, however, for one or two more Thursdays; but at last, finding it completely inefficacious, he gave in, and we were allowed to return to our original plan of early mess, and dancing afterwards. Perhaps the only person who regretted the change was the old lady at the hotel, to whom it must have made a considerable difference, as she no longer supplied us with a weekly dinner. I don't think Colonel Dropmore felt on very friendly terms with us for awhile after this; it would not have been natural that he should; but by degrees his anger died out, and being a good-natured little fellow, he forgot and forgave the whole matter, only retaining a prejudice against poor Cecil Egerton, whom, in some unaccountable way,

he had taken it into his head to consider a ringleader in the rebellion against him, and with whom he continued very sharp and snappish in consequence.

It was now August. Lots of our fellows had got leave to go off to Scotland for the twelfth; Claude would have gone too, I think, but for Miss Bambridge. I being such a very youthful individual, did not get the chance. We were pretty sure to have good shooting where we were, however. It was a good grouse country, and we had many friends who all wanted us to be with them on the twentieth. Indeed we could not divide ourselves among them all, and so accepted General Bambridge's invitation, as being the most attractive. There was something besides grouse in it—the certainty of coming back to dinner after the day's sport, and the possibility of luncheon among the heather, with Gwendoline and Clarissa to brighten the repast with their presence. Besides we heard the shooting was good, so we had a sufficient excuse for yielding to the real attraction, which was not in any way connected with the sport of grouse-shooting.

There is something delightful to me in the balmy, heather-scented mountain air, it raises one's spirits, and makes everything appear twice as beautiful and exhilarating, as the same thing would seem down in the dull, damp lowlands.

I always did love the mountains, though I confess that in this country some of them are execrable walking, and I should like to know how a fellow can be expected to hit a bird when he is balancing on the extreme point of a conical tussock, in a quaking bog, where one false step will plunge him up to his neck in a bog-hole, from whence, if he be not immediately rescued, he may never be released, as he will settle down into it very quickly, disappearing altogether shortly. I found these little peculiarities in the nature of the ground interfered with my shooting, and what disturbed me still more was the knowledge that, as I anticipated, Mrs. Bambridge and her two daughters would bring up the luncheon-basket later in the day. A rendezvous had been appointed by a beautiful mountain lakelet, and, like a fool as I was, I let fancy pictures of our little forthcoming picnic

get between me and all my best shots. Claude was shooting very well ; neither his mental nor bodily equilibrium was so easily upset as mine, and I looked at him sometimes with wonder, not unmixed with envy.

We had with us a Scotch gamekeeper in the employment of a neighbouring proprietor, over whose land we had permission to shoot ; and, besides, we had four Irish fellows, queer chaps, who told you long stories about packs of birds they had seen, that we never by any chance came across, and that we presently became aware were just as apocryphal as the Scotchman's tales of wonderful setters that had belonged to his last employer.

The heather was a mass of purple bloom, the walking, as I have said, was execrable, and the heat of the day intense. Claude and General Bambridge did not seem to mind it, neither did Cecil Egerton, who was a wonderful shot, never missed, but spent his whole time regretting he had not brought his sketching-block, becoming every now and then so absorbed in the view that the grouse rose almost under his feet without his seeing them. But I must

acknowledge I found the work rather hard, and was very glad when we arrived at the tarn, and found the ladies there awaiting us.

They had laid their table at the foot of a high bank of heather, against which we could rest our backs, and which afforded us a very welcome shelter from the blazing August sun.

Clarissa chaffed me on my fatigue, and on my want of success.

"I thought you were a good shot," she said; "but I do believe I could do better myself. Shall we try after lunch?"

"With all my heart," I answered. "What shall we try at? Will you join our party and blaze away at the grouse?"

"Oh no," she laughed. "I don't pretend to hit anything unless it will stand still for me. We will put your hat up on a stick and shoot at it."

"Willingly," I answered, "if you will put yours on another, for me to take a shot at. That is only fair."

She took off her hat and looked at it.

"I bought this hat second-hand," she said, "from a lady who had nearly done wearing it."

It cost me two shillings and twopence half-penny, and, as it is becoming, I don't think that dear. How much did yours cost?"

"Clarissa, my dear," interrupted her mother, "put on your hat, or you will have a sunstroke. What are you asking Mr. Darrell?"

"I was only asking him what his hat cost," replied Clarissa, unconcernedly. "He hasn't told me yet. How much was it?"

"Ten shillings," I answered, taking off the article in question, and holding it out towards her to examine. "Mine is worth more than yours, it seems, but then I am more likely to do mischief than you are, so perhaps, after all, it is pretty fair."

"You will have to give me a nearer range, though," she continued. "I could not take the matter up unless you will give it to me at twenty yards, and you at sixty."

"That is rather long odds in your favour," I remonstrated. "I don't think I could make such a bargain."

"All the better for my poor hat, then," she returned, smoothing down the feathers with her hand. "Don't you think, Gwen, it was a very reasonable offer?"

"Very, indeed," replied Gwen, absently, with her eyes fixed on a piece of white heather Feversham had just offered her. "Indeed," she added, brightening up suddenly, as though afraid of letting herself relapse into dreamland, "if Vivian gives you such a chance, I will take a shot at it myself."

This decided me. Of course she had only entered into Clarissa's rather original scheme for amusing herself in order to please me (so I told myself), and immediately all the resistance I had prepared against her sister's claim for a twenty yards range vanished. Gwendoline might have blown my hat to bits had she felt so disposed, and I should only have been flattered.

I was the more pleased now because I saw an impatient frown pass over Claude's face when Gwendoline announced her intention of shooting with us. It was evident he perceived her partiality for me, I thought, and was displeased at it. I think that made me enjoy myself all the more; it showed that there really was a chance for me, that I was dangerous, and I rose in my own estimation accordingly.

What a merry luncheon that was to me! How we laughed and jested, and afterwards made the gamekeepers and gossoons sing for us! Then Gwendoline and Clarissa sang, and finally we set about our shooting match.

Mrs. Bambridge insisted on being in it too, and declared she would beat any of us, Mr. Egerton excepted. He had earned himself a wonderful name as a shot (whenever he did choose to shoot), but, as I said before, he was generally mooning when his gun should have been to his shoulder.

And my poor hat was to come in for most of it, as none of the gentlemen were in the match but myself; Clarissa vehemently declaring she would not have her most killing head-gear destroyed by the deadly fire of veteran warriors, as she was pleased to call Claude and Egerton.

To my surprise and great disgust, they contrived to pepper my new tile in very destructive fashion, and it did not help me to bear the matter better to hear Feversham grumble close behind me:

"Serves the confounded puppy right! I

wish he had come in for a few grains himself!"

A minute's reflection convinced me he would not have said this but for jealousy; and, encouraged by this idea, I went home that evening perfectly happy.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAMILY ARRANGEMENT.

ALL this time, while Claude was getting himself more and more involved in the net of Gwendoline Bambridge's fascinations, he seemed to forget what his mother would say to the whole affair, and he also ceased to remember a family arrangement that this infatuation of his promised to upset completely.

Not very far from the "Castle," as Feversham's place was called in the county, there lived a family of the name of Prendergast. They were very wealthy, and had one daughter, Mabel, who, as the heiress to such a splendid property, was very much run after. Claude's mother, Lady Feversham, had, however, planned

a match between her son and the young lady in question—a match that met with the full approval, not only of Mr. and Mrs. Prendergast, but of Miss Mabel also, the only one who did not see the matter in the most favourable light being the Captain himself.

The affair had long been arranged, and he, though not intending to marry at present, had never distinctly refused to have the young lady; only his mother had been unable to work him up to the proposing point, and, until that formality had been gone through, the match could not be regarded as quite settled.

The girl herself was only eighteen, and had not long been out; she had heard, however, quite enough of the plans of the family to know for whom she was destined—an arrangement in which, after meeting and dancing with Claude once or twice, she perfectly coincided.

Mabel Prendergast was tall, dark, and slight, beautifully made, with pretty hands and feet, immense masses of black hair, shaded at the edges with rusty brown, and curious red-brown eyes, that possessed a strange, inscrutable, sphinx-like expression; more the eyes of a wild

beast than of a human being, but they were capable of great fascination, probably from their very singularity ; a pale complexion, with only the faintest creamy tinge of colour in her cheeks, and an indescribable air of coquetry hovering round her pretty mouth, as one who could be saucy and coaxing both, if she thought it worth her while to try.

This was the girl whose very faintly traced image was rapidly being obliterated from Claude's heart by the queenly beauty of Gwendoline Bambridge ; and so lightly did he regard the known wishes of the families that he never deemed it possible they might look on his lazy indifference to their schemes in the light of acquiescence, and even think him virtually engaged.

Lady Feversham was fond of Mabel. She liked the girl's strange beauty, she liked her rich, tasteful dress, and, above all, she liked to listen to the piquant stories and quaint witticisms constantly falling, in the softest, most musical tones, from those charming lips.

Therefore Mabel was with her constantly, riding over from The Poplars unattended, and

passing hours of the day in walking round the garden with her future mother-in-law, or in the cold weather sitting snugly up to the fire, listening to the latest news from Claude.

"He does not write me very long letters now, dear," complained the elder lady one day; "he seems amusing himself, however. There is a General Bambridge who appears to be civil to them, and they are constantly at his place."

"Has he any daughters?" asked Mabel, with a sudden perception of the truth bursting in on her.

"Yes, two," answered Lady Feversham—"odd, Irish kind of girls, I fancy. I remember his telling me how he first met them. One of them tried to horsewhip him for fishing on her father's ground without leave. Great, hoydenish vulgarians, I imagine they must be; but, after all, when you have said they are Irish, that is enough to explain the kind of people they are."

"Do you think so, Lady Feversham?" said Mabel softly, but with an accent that plainly said such was not her opinion. "I have heard some people say Irish girls are very

charming; perhaps your son finds them so too."

"Tush, child! I don't know who can have told you such a thing; but I am convinced a Feversham would find nothing fascinating about them; moreover, my dear, you know my wish with regard to my son and you."

"Yes, I know," answered the girl, with a smile so careless and indifferent that the most skilled physiognomist would have been puzzled to detect any deep feeling beneath it; "but your son may not obey your wish in this instance. And do you know," she continued, with more energy, and a faint, saucy smile dawning on her rosy lips, "I am not quite sure that I should care for the fulfilment of your desire either, if it is only to please you he does it? It is foolish, is it not, Lady Feversham?" she went on, taking a rosebud out of a vase and arranging it in front of her dress, "to wish to be married for oneself—not because one has money and it suits the families. But, do you know, I think I am foolish after all. Let Lord Claude look to it, if he does not want a silly wife."

So saying, she turned away with a rippling laugh that broke from her only on rare occasions,

but then all the more beautiful for its rarity, it pleased the ear like the tinkling of a mountain stream trickling over a mossy bed.

"What a strange child it is!" thought Lady Feversham, watching her as she walked over to a sofa and threw herself on it, still laughing. "I hope she may not be tired of waiting; and that Claude will not lose the bonnie bride I have been keeping for him all these years. As to her idea about those Irish girls, it must be absurd. However, I will write to Lady Longwreath about it; she often goes to that part of the world, and most likely has friends there who give her all the news."

Lady Feversham, once startled, lost no time in endeavouring to find out the way matters were going on in Ireland. She wrote that night to Lady Longwreath, explaining her anxieties, and beseeching her friend to find out if there really was any danger to be apprehended from those Irish Bambridge girls.

She had to wait more than a week before she could possibly hope to get an answer, during which time she petted and caressed Mabel even more than usual, so fearful was she of losing

the labour of many years—a contingency she had never even contemplated till after Mabel's curious speech the day before.

As for Mabel, her rosy lips wore their faint, triumphant expression more frequently during those days than ever before. "Mentally," she said, "this will decide the matter; something will be arranged; and at least, if he is infatuated about any bog-trotting belle over there, I shall be taken up to London, and shall queen it during the season to my heart's content."

For she was well aware of her power, though she knew it had done little for her with Claude Feversham: partly because she had never cared to triumph in that quarter, believing the matter secure by family compact. It would have been like making love to one's husband to have shown him any attention, she thought; only, if she had known, perhaps it might have been worth while. For now that the prize was about to slip from her grasp, or seemed ready to do so, she began to have an idea that she had lost something that had been pleasant to her. His face was handsome, his manner gentle; certainly she had seen none she liked

better, and she might have grown to like him more, if he had but felt warmly towards her. But that was the annoying part of it all, as she had told Lady Feversham; she was inclined to be foolish, and now more so than ever. It was not that she wanted particularly to care for her husband—she could do without that; but it was imperative he should care for her. •

About ten days after, as she sat at breakfast with Lady Feversham, when the post-bag was opened she saw a letter with the Longwreath crest, and waited impatiently whilst her hostess broke the seal and slowly perused a very lengthy epistle. The red-brown eyes watched Lady Feversham closely as she conned over her friend's letter—so closely, indeed, that before the elder lady had half finished reading it, the younger knew its contents from the expression of her friend's countenance, and knew, moreover, that its purport was unfavourable to her hopes.

“Well,” she asked, when Lady Feversham at length looked up, with a very disturbed face, “is this Irish belle as fascinating as I foretold?”

"Do not joke about it, child," groaned the old lady. "This is very serious. Lady Longwreath has not only found out that Claude is really *épris* with this Miss Bambridge, but she also adds she knows the young lady well herself, and can answer for it that, having obtained an influence over any man, she will not be easily forgotten."

Mabel flushed up a little more than her wont; it sounded like a challenge to her, like a slur cast on her powers of captivation, that this girl should be so spoken of before her, and she tapped her saucer impatiently with her spoon as she thought,

"Oh! if only I had him here, he should soon forget his Irish charmer!"

It was never her cue, however, to speak out what she felt, so she asked, carelessly,

"And what will you do now? I am afraid your wishes can hardly be fulfilled as the matter stands, even were I willing."

"Oh! my dear Mabel, don't decide anything in a hurry," begged Lady Feversham. "It is quite impossible he can marry this girl, she has no money, and you know it was I brought all

the late Lord Feversham's property to him, and can leave it entirely and absolutely to whom I choose. Therefore, if I was driven to it, I could disinherit Claude, who would find his title a very empty concern, without the money to keep it up. You know, dear, I am afraid, however badly he treated me in the matter, I could not keep up the quarrel with him long. I can be very determined, none more so, for a short time, but, after that has lasted a little while, my resolutions weaken, and I could forget and forgive anything. He knows this as well as I do, and therefore I fear any threat of disinheritance from me will be little regarded. Still I can't allow this marriage. How would you advise me to stop it?"

Mabel mused awhile, and Lady Feversham, watching her, could not help being struck by the curious mingling of expressions visible on her countenance. There was a kind of triumphant look, along with determination and cunning, and even a slight shade of tenderness in her smile, as she leant her head on her hand, and gazed thoughtfully out of the window before her. After a few moments' pause, she

turned to her companion with a quiet, unmoved manner, and answered,

“If you are determined this is not to be, you must make up your mind to go any lengths in support of your authority. For myself I do not care; my feelings, fortunately, were never engaged in this scheme, but if your objections to the match rest on other grounds, and you are resolved to stop it, I will help you to do so, and can make you almost certain of success, if you will take no step in the matter but such as I advise.”

“I wish you would not throw off all personal interest in the match,” answered her companion, pettishly; “if you can stop his marrying her, why can’t you take him yourself, as you know all your friends wish?”

“No,” replied the girl, decidedly; “I will not work in it as a personal affair, and I renounce, at least for the present, all prospect of winning Lord Feversham’s affection, or being more to him than I am now. Only under these conditions can I assist you in the matter; I think, if you consider, you will see there is wisdom in it, too. If it should ever come to

Lord Claude's ears that I had assisted you in separating him from Miss Bambridge, with the understanding I was to marry him as my reward, do you think I should be one whit nearer gaining him than I am now?"

"If he hears of it, it will tell against you, no matter what your motives may have been," answered the elder lady. "We must take care he knows nothing about it."

"What you say is very true," replied the girl; but she added, with a little hesitation, "Don't you see that, if I do it with no desire to win him, he cannot pride himself afterwards on having foiled me, if he takes some other girl to whom you can have no objection. Believe me, Lady Feversham, if I help you at all, it must be in my own way."

"Very well," answered her friend, "it shall be as you wish. Now what do you recommend?"

"That you should write to him without delay; tell him what you have heard, point out how dependent he is on you for all the comforts he enjoys at present, and that you not only can but will exercise your power to the uttermost

to prevent his marriage with this Miss Cambridge."

There was intense scorn in the accent with which Mabel Prendergast spoke the last three words, as she rose, fetched paper and writing materials, laid them before Lady Feversham, and continued:—"I am going to ride over to The Poplars now, papa and mamma will be expecting me; I have not seen them for two or three days. Write your letter, and I can post it in the village as I go through; it will leave a mail sooner. Stay, let me give you a draft of what you ought to say; I am afraid you will not be sufficiently decided."

It was a strange sight to see the pretty, graceful girl, with such a hard, determined look on her delicate face, sit down and dash off the lines, that the elder lady waited submissively to copy when she had done. Her part of the business finished, Mabel ran lightly to her room to dress for riding; she was expeditious over her toilet, and when it was finished, paused for a moment before the glass, to survey her own image reflected there. A dainty picture it was; the slight round figure in its

neat, well-fitting habit, the plain high hat perched securely on the massive coils of black hair, the tiny edge of white collar tracing the round of her slender throat—all formed an harmonious, workmanlike appearance, that suggested irresistibly visions of a light hand and a graceful seat, a fiery steed and daring rider.

But she was not thinking of horses and horsemanship at that minute, she was saying to herself, "I wonder why I am taking so much trouble about this business of Claude Feversham's? Is he worth it? My friends say he is, because he is rich and titled, but that is nothing to me; young De Vaux is richer, and will have a title too some day, and he adores me, which haughty Lord Feversham does not. His mother tells me he is worth it, because a kind son is sure to make a kind husband. Good and true, she calls him. What is that to me, I wonder? I am not good and true, I am sure," she went on with a short laugh; "if I were, instead of trying to chisel this poor girl out of her lover, I should be helping her to keep him. But I should not object to his liking me, I confess; he is cold, and grave, and gentle; I should like to

have power over him, to be able to ruffle that calm of his by my slightest word or smile—to make his heart beat angrily when I was cold, and rapturously when I was kind. Yes, I know now why I care about it; it is the love of power urges me. I should like to have power over a mind like his, and I will yet, if I am not much mistaken. Does Miss Bambridge like him, I wonder, or is her motive the same as mine? If it is, *gare à vous*, Mademoiselle, it will be war to the knife between us, and we shall see which is the strongest.” As she finished these reflections she turned away, and, catching up her whip and gloves, tripped lightly down to Lady Feversham.

In a minute or two more the note was in the pocket of her saddle, and reining in her fiery horse with a practised hand, she sauntered down the avenue. The groom stood for a few minutes watching the impetuous animal she was on, as it snatched and pulled at the bit, backing and kicking from exuberance of spirits, in a way that most people would have found unpleasant.

“She’s the pluckiest piece, that one, I ever

came across," he soliloquised ; " see how quietly she takes that beast, that half the men in the county wouldn't mount for their lives, Eh ! but she has a rare spice of the devil in her ! " The object of this eulogium rode on quietly till she left the domain, then turning into the fields, she set off in a hand gallop across country, the nearest way to The Poplars, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and riding at every thing with a skill and judgment that betokened long practice. At this pace they soon reached her father's domain, where we will leave her riding slowly up the avenue.

CHAPTER IX.

A MISADVENTURE.

STILL the same routine was going on in Bel-murphy ; there were the same dances and pic-nics and croquet parties, though the Summer was almost at an end, and the grouse shooting had begun some time. Not that the shooting interfered in the least with the flirtations carried on during the time of idleness ; on the contrary, it afforded additional opportunities for anything of the kind. First there was the early breakfast, at which those of the ladies who liked could put in an appearance ; then there was the luncheon-party on the hills, where fun and merriment reigned supreme, and where bets were

made in the most reckless manner on the luck of individuals. These lunches also not unfrequently broke up the shooting-party to a fearful degree, for no matter how keen the sportsman might be beforehand, a pair of bright eyes looking entreatingly, when the signal for a move was made, would often produce an entire revulsion in a fellow's feelings, and cause him to pronounce a good day's work confoundedly slow.

Claude and I had no end of fun at the Barmbridges', and I am sure, after the first day, my shooting raised me considerably in everybody's eyes; they could not persist in thinking me a child when I rarely if ever missed, and brought home twice as many birds as they did.

But though of course I felt a little pleased, I was too uneasy and anxious to care much about it. Gwendoline still lured us both on, with so much impartiality, it would have been impossible to say which was most favoured. But I feared, and was unhappy; it seemed impossible she should prefer me to one so much more worthy of her in every way as Claude was. How painfully I felt all my short-comings,

and how I longed to imitate Feversham's grave stately ways, and copy his quiet protecting manner when speaking to her.

But I felt that part was not for me, that I was nothing if I was not natural, and so I held my ground as well as I could, though my usually gay spirit would at times sink very low when I realised how little hope there was before me.

One fine morning, about the end of August, I noticed that Claude seemed worried and anxious, as he came down to breakfast; after a time he turned to me suddenly and said,

"Madcap, come out for a walk with me this morning, I want you."

"All right," I replied, wondering what he might have to say, for latterly, though he had been kinder than ever to me, we had spoken very little to each other.

I was rather surprised, therefore, when pulling a letter out of his pocket he handed it to me, saying as he did so: "Read that, and tell me what you think of it."

Wondering, I opened it, seeing it was in my aunt Anna's handwriting. I was no doubt

astonished when I found she was acquainted with Claude's infatuation (as she called it), but hardly surprised at the light in which she viewed it, not knowing Miss Bambridge, or anything about her. The letter was short, severe, and to the purpose ; ordering Claude to renounce all intention of marrying this girl, on pain of being disinherited, a threat which the writer then proceeded to show, in a very business-like manner, it was fully in her power to carry out.

"What shall you do?" I asked, as I handed the letter back to him.

"There is but one course open to me," he answered ; "I will not sell my love for a crust of bread and a mess of pottage, as Esau of old sold his birthright. I will take this letter with me to Endley, show it to Gwendoline, tell her how truly I love her ; I will ask her if she is willing to share what I have got, which is little more than my captain's pay, or whether she cares so little for me that the prospect of poverty frightens her. I am not quite sure of my ground, and would have preferred putting off this question for some time longer, but now it must come out. Vivian," he continued, after a

pause, in a low tone of stern displeasure, "I know that you care, or fancy you care, for Miss Bambridge, that you imagine yourself my rival; but even so, how could you have persuaded yourself to act in this manner? I trusted you, and you have grievously disappointed me."

"How?" I asked calmly. "In daring to love the same person as yourself, I suppose. Claude, that is too absurd; you are my senior in years and rank both, and I am willing to pay you all requisite deference on that account, but I cannot see how you can expect me to yield my own chances of happiness, in order to make yours more certain. It is a demand I should never have expected you to make; that you know well I would never comply with."

"I never made any such demand of you," replied Claude, harshly. "What I allude to is the dishonourable means you have used, to try and remove me from your path. Two can play at that game, remember, though I would scorn to soil my hands with such a deed, and therefore you think you are safe; but what would you say were I to write to your mother, and tell her what you are doing here? In your

case it would probably have much the same results as in mine, only that Lord Traverscourt cannot disinherit you ; but no doubt they would take some equally effectual steps to save you from the consequences of what, in your case, they might, with some reason, term your folly."

I stood still with amazement when I saw at what Claude was hinting. How he got the idea into that wise head of his, I cannot conceive. It would indeed have been vastly amusing, had it not been so very insulting. I tried to speak several times, but he would go on ; so at last I waited patiently till he had finished, then I said, rather angrily,

"Look here, Claude, I take a good deal from you because you are my cousin, and my best friend ; but what you have just been saying is not chaff, and I won't stand it. Don't speak to me in that way again."

"If I had been you," answered Claude, "I would not have laid myself open to being spoken to in that way. It is well for you no one but me knows it, or you would have a bad time of it among our fellows. For the sake of your father

and mother, and still more for my own sake, as you are my cousin, I will say nothing about it this time; but if I ever catch you meddling with my affairs, I will first horsewhip you within an inch of your life, and then tell the reason I did so, afterwards."

"Good Heavens, Claude! you must be mad!" I cried, really thinking there must be a screw loose somewhere, to render him capable of such a supposition. "Why, Claude, you ought not to want such an assurance from me, and I ought not to stoop to give it to you; but as I am aware that you are upset by this letter, I will act as kindly towards you as I can, and give you my word that I am as ignorant as you are of how your mother became cognisant of the state of affairs here. If you like, you can verify what I say by asking Aunt Anna if I have ever written to her, or from whom she heard it."

He looked at me hard as I spoke, and I met his glance unflinchingly. I saw that his mind was terribly disordered by the fears that such an interruption to the even course of his love had caused, and I knew that, unless such had

been the case, a suspicion of me, such as he now harboured, would never have entered into his head.

After a long pause, during which his look seemed as though it would have penetrated my very soul, he shook his head, as if to dash away unwelcome thoughts, and said,

"You are true, Vivian, and I ought not to have doubted you. But until you are placed in such a position as mine, you can have no idea what crowds of hateful suggestions jealousy and fear bring into one's mind. A day or two ago I thought myself very sure of her, and now I cannot see that I have any ground for hope at all. But I must ask her, and that immediately. After all, if she is what I take her to be, this will make no difference."

I had perhaps indulged in a hope that he would have given her up, for my heart seemed to stand still as he announced his intention of asking her at once.

"Why do you tell this to me?" I asked, almost angrily. "You know I do not wish you success."

"Is it still so?" he answered, slowly. "I

had hoped you might have seen the matter differently now. Still I thought it fair you should know I was going to speak, and why I do so."

Suddenly a light flashed upon me.

"You will have to wait," I cried; "they go to Dublin to-day, for a week or two. There is something going on there they wish to see."

"True," he replied; "I had forgotten that. Then I must wait till their return. In the meantime, I will write to my mother, and assure her that no threats shall prevent my at least trying to win the woman I love, for my wife. There is some baby-faced miss living near us, who will be a great heiress; and her ladyship has set her mind on my marrying the child. That, I know full well, is the cause of this violent opposition; but she need not have troubled herself so much, for, even if I cannot have Gwendoline, I will never take the prim little chit she has chosen for me—a mere wax doll, a kind of puppet, on which to hang fine clothes and jewelry, with as little soul as her own money-bags!"

I had, of course, heard of Mabel Prendergast, but had never seen her. I could not, therefore, judge whether his accusations against her were correct, but I felt quite inclined to join in condemning one whom Claude so despised, though under all a secret wish that her rival claims might prevail gave me a little more hope and courage than I had for long possessed.

Whilst we were so occupied with our own difficulties and troubles, the others had been amusing themselves more or less well, according to their characters and dispositions. Mayleigh, for instance—keen, cautious, and calculating, with no money but his pay, and a very ready wit—had become welcome in all societies in the place. His forte was to feign a devotion he did not feel, wherever he thought his interests might be furthered by so doing. He had on hand at present a very promising flirtation with the heiress of the district. In that quarter his attentions were unremitting, having a far greater appearance of devotion than much real affection has. We did not scruple, however, to say that the fascinations of her handsome property were in his eyes the real causes of attraction, though

she was a pretty and pleasant girl, well worth attention on her own account.

One string to his bow would never have satisfied Mayleigh, who accordingly was very devoted to several others when the chief prize was not by ; where his heart could be amongst them all, we could not make out ; but that was his affair, not ours.

Flower was a susceptible youth, and of course was not long without getting up one of those safe flirtations of which he was so fond. The object in this instance was a remarkably pretty girl, who could hold her own in a ball-room against many beauties of experience and repute. The art of flirtation was not unknown to her ; and though, no doubt, had there been higher game unmarked, she would have flown at it, yet she was not disposed to cavil at anything that promised so much amusement as Flower's infatuation.

There was to be a pic-nic up the lake the day after my conversation with Claude, given by one of the notabilities of the place ; to this poor Flower was looking forward with the full intention of making great play, and taking advan-

tage of every facility afforded him to prosecute his advances in her favour.

Not that it must be for one minute supposed he had the least intention of going in for the prize seriously ; no, that was very far from his thoughts ; but his was one of those minds that never seem thoroughly happy unless they are balancing themselves, as it were, over an abyss into which the slightest false step will precipitate them on one side or the other.

The day was fine and sunny ; the young lady was there looking her brightest and best, Flower and Mayleigh were in their glory, while Claude and I, deprived of our usual service, devoted ourselves assiduously to the general good.

The dinner passed off as pic-nics generally do, except that nothing was forgotten. It might even have been pleasanter than these out-of-door entertainments generally are, but for the prodigious swarms of biting insects—ants on the ground, midges in the air, rendering anything like enjoyment of the meal impossible. How we fanned and shook ourselves, and got into a white heat beating off the intruders ! Mosquitoes are a joke to a swarm of lake midges, and

some of our party were really disfigured by their attacks.

A few of the ladies, however, seemed quite safe from their importunities, and to these few it must have been rather laughable, watching the frantic gestures of the sufferers. Why are people so fond of pic-nics? It seems to me such a waste of time and trouble; everything in the entertainer's house is turned five times more topsy-turvy than if they gave a dinner or a dance; besides which, and over and above the insect plagues, is the fact that people having nothing particular to do, except in the case of very marked flirtations, do not amalgamate well.

After dinner it was the thing to walk round the island, and everyone set off accordingly. This was just what Flower wanted—it would be such a good occasion for the soft, half-sentimental nonsense he was so fond of uttering. They set off, therefore, at a quiet pace, and were soon deep in the language of flowers, when Mayleigh, prompted by the spirit of mischief, and angry because a third person had spoilt his tête-à-tête with the heiress, determined to join

Flower and assist the young lady to annihilate him.

For Mayleigh, who got on well with the ladies, knew that Beatrice Graham liked setting down her sentimental squire occasionally, and he guessed by her look there would be some fun to-day.

"Where is the heiress?" demanded Flower, as Mayleigh approached. "You had much better be with her. We don't want you here."

"Oh! pray don't go, Mr. Mayleigh," broke in Beatrice Graham. "Mr. Flower is explaining a bouquet to me so nicely. I had no idea the language of flowers could be so interesting. Do you know anything of it?"

This question she addressed to Mayleigh, turning her large hazel eyes, brimming over with fun, full upon him.

"I can't say I do," he replied; "but I would like immensely to hear Flower's explanation. It is never too late to learn, and it might be of use to me some day."

"Come up here," cried Flower, anxious to change the subject, and leading the way to a precipitous craggy hill that commanded a wide

view of the lake. "It's fearfully steep," he went on, holding out his hand to assist Miss Graham, "but the prospect from the top well repays one for the climb."

He hoped by this manoeuvre to shake off Mayleigh, who was of a lazy disposition, and averse to hard walking without an adequate motive. On this occasion, scenting amusement from afar, he would not be shaken off, but clambered up along with them. It was indeed steep, as Flower had observed, and moreover very slippery, so much so that a single false step would send the unlucky climber sliding to the bottom a great deal more quickly than he had got up; but thanks to the gentlemen's sticks, which they dug firmly into the ground at every step, the summit was at last gained.

Here they sat down to recover breath, and felt themselves fully rewarded for their trouble by the scene before them. The lake in its whole extent lay at their feet, nestled in among its shadowy woods, and overhung by lofty mountains, the water glistening like a sheet of silver, the boat they came in moored below, with the crew eating their dinner beside it, a

yacht spreading its white sails far away towards the upper end of the lake, while close below them, at the foot of the hill, the greater number of the pic-nic party had gathered, laughing and talking, and calling up to them, to know if it was worth the climb to get there.

“We don’t want them up,” cried Flower, impatiently. “Let us say there is nothing worth looking at, and that we are coming down.”

As he spoke he set his foot against a tuft of grass before him, and leant forward to answer. With the pressure of his foot the grass gave way, and the next minute he was sliding rapidly downward. Finding himself going, he caught wildly around for something to hold by, grasped a portion of Beatrice Graham’s dress, and holding on to that with the energy of despair, though not knowing, in his bewilderment, what it was, he pulled her from her seat, and the next moment they would both have been descending the hill pell-mell, when Mayleigh caught her by the arm and drew her back, just in time to save her, but not to save her dress, a pretty light muslin, that, unable to bear the strain put on it, tore with a loud crack, and

Flower, once set free, slipped down the hill, gathering impetus every moment, till he glided into the middle of the laughing group at the bottom, dirty, torn, and scratched, very red in the face, very confused, and smeared with earth, but not hurt in any way. As soon as it was ascertained he had not suffered from the adventure, the laughing was long and loud at his expense, and it did not diminish when Miss Graham, who had descended with Mayleigh in a slower and more dignified manner, appeared upon the scene, holding up her tattered dress, and saying,

“How did it feel, Mr. Flower? I hope you are not the worse for it. My poor dress, I fear, has been the greatest sufferer. I think you have some of it in your hand still. Would you give it me?”

“Really, Miss Graham,” gasped Flower, hardly yet in full possession of his senses, “I think you might leave it to me as a remembrance of this day.”

Shouts of laughter greeted this speech, and the half-devotional, half-convulsive manner in which Flower pressed the tumbled bit of muslin

to his heart, whilst Beatrice Graham answered, smiling,

"I should have thought you might have been able to remember this day without a souvenir, but if the memories connected with it are so very dear, I really think I must allow you to keep the muslin; whenever you look at it you may picture yourself once more on this hill, and recall again the pleasant sensations that took possession of you when you grasped my poor dress so firmly."

This answer seemed to reveal to Flower the fact that we were all there, and laughing at him, for, colouring even more than he had already done, he looked from Miss Graham to the fragment in his hand for several minutes, evidently puzzled what to do with it now he had got it. At last a bright idea seemed to strike him.

"You are right, Miss Graham," he began. "I need no remembrance such as this to remind me of a happy day; and you will no doubt want the piece to repair the mischief I have done, though you were kind enough not to refuse me when I asked for it. I will therefore take the

liberty of calling to-morrow and returning it to you, if you will allow me."

"Oh, for shame!" cried Miss Graham, laughing—"a gentleman returning a lady's gift in that way! You deserve to be punished for thinking of such a thing, and I have a great mind to forbid you my presence for a week in consequence."

"You couldn't be so cruel," pleaded Flower. "It will be very hard for me to give up this souvenir, though when I thought you might want it I was willing to do so. None but you, however, could obtain it from me, and if you do not require it, I shall keep it and prize it as my most precious treasure."

Flower tried to look very sentimental as he said this; but Beatrice Graham, who had plenty of wit, and always kept her senses about her, began to see that, though as yet the laugh had been against her admirer, if the matter went on much longer she might come in for her share of ridicule; so she answered decisively,

"You are quite right, Mr. Flower—I shall want it. You may as well give it to me now. It is not too much for me to carry home."

So saying, she took the scrap the crestfallen young fellow handed to her, and walked off with Mayleigh, Flower following in gloomy silence at a little distance.

They made it up again before long, however, as I saw them dancing together that evening; the pic-nic winding up with a small hop given by our entertainers the Pearces.

CHAPTER X.

MATCHMAKING.

WHILST relating the events recorded in the last chapters, I have been losing sight of Cecil Egerton, which is strange when I come to remember it, as not only was he my most constant companion whenever Claude was otherwise occupied, but also about this time he became mixed up with people and incidents that afterwards exercised a great influence not only on his life, but also on Feversham's and mine.

He had only been a few weeks at Belmurphy, when one morning he came into my room early. I was lazy that day, and was still in bed; we had had very hard work the last few days after

the grouse up among the heather, and I was quite worn out. Claude was tired too, I know, though he would not allow that it was so. Cecil, of all of us, was the only one who did not seem to mind the severe exercise we had gone through; and he often told me he thought the life of privation he had led when a boy made him more able to support physical fatigue than most men in his position. It was all such child's-play compared to the misery and wretchedness he had then undergone, when helping his parents in their struggle for existence, and there was now none of the mental effort and suffering that had been worse to bear than physical trial.

So he only looked fresher and brighter for his week's exertions, whilst I was glad to lie an hour or two longer in bed, and Claude and others spent some additional time lounging over letters and papers that a day or two before had been glanced at and then thrown aside for consideration at a more convenient opportunity. But as Cecil came into my room that morning I saw that his face did not wear its usual bright expression; in fact, he seemed perplexed.

"Just read that," he said, tossing me a letter, and sitting down on the foot of the bed.

"Don't you see a fellow's asleep?" I answered, not willing to disturb myself and let the air into my warm nest. "Read it yourself; I'll listen."

He picked up the letter, and proceeded to read as desired. It was from his uncle, reminding him that it was now six years since he had entered the Army, and that during all that time he had only once returned to Beaumanoir to see his uncle, or thank him for what he had done for him. Not that the writer expected thanks—at least, he said he did not. Gratitude, according to him, was the most foolish of all those foolish perversions of intellect called virtues; in fact, it could only be excused in any rational being by the rendering, "a lively expectation of favours to come;" but in that light it was entitled to consideration; if his nephew had learnt anything by his contact with the world—which Mr. Vansittart was inclined to doubt—in that light he would consider it. His uncle went on to say that he should be glad of his nephew's company for a few weeks;

he had some arrangements to propose to him—looking upon him as his possible heir—and he would be glad if Cecil would make it convenient to come to him soon.

When Egerton had finished reading he looked at me with a very gloomy expression on his generally cheerful countenance.

“A rum old chap the fellow must be that wrote that letter,” I said when he had finished; “I wish he would offer to adopt me, I feel convinced his peculiar views, as exemplified by that production, would suit me down to the ground. I wonder you have not made up to him more, Cecil.”

“I hate him,” replied Egerton, with a kind of suppressed vehemence; “you know how he treated us, while my father lived—let him die of neglect to gratify his vindictive spite, and in so acting, caused my mother’s death also;—but that is not all, though it is enough to make me wish to avoid him, to make me hate the advantages he offers me. Besides that, he would ensure my moral death if he could, kill everything upright or honourable in me, and make me the human reptile he is himself. Surely, Darrell, living in

the same county with him, you must have heard something of him, you must know the estimation in which he is held, and which clings to me like Medea's poisoned shirt, wherever I am introduced as his nephew. I have seen people look at me askance, and whisper, when some kind friend has told them I was brought up by Mr. Vansittart, and am to be his heir; for everyone in those parts believes that is to be so, though I myself think he has no such intention, but only holds out the hope of it as a bait to lure me into obedience to his wishes, to conformity with his views."

"I have heard about him," I answered, not caring to pursue that side of the conversation further; I remembered hearing no measured terms of reprobation used when speaking of him, and I could not recollect ever having known anyone say a word in his praise. "You will go to Beaumanoir of course," I continued, hoping to make him look at some brighter aspect of this visit.

"I suppose I must," he answered; "it is true I owe everything I am to him; I often wish so much I did not, it hangs like a chain round my

neck, to think his money has provided for me for so many years. I ought to be able to pay it back some day ; I would not try to do so to anyone else, but he has no feelings to hurt, and I think it would please him. I know some of my sketches would sell, if I could work myself up to the point of offering them for sale, but foolishly I feel shy about doing so. However, I shall spend a few days in London on leaving Beaumanoir, and will then try what I can do. Mr. Vansittart thinks I have never been on leave all these years, that I am devoted to the Army, and my comrades, as indeed I am ; but he is far from suspecting that I am still an artist at heart, and prosecute my studies in that line as vigorously as ever. He thinks he has quite eradicated the hereditary taint, and if he finds he is mistaken, he would disinherit me without a moment's compunction."

"What an old fool !" I exclaimed ; "but really, after all, I don't see what there is to say against your going ; the old fellow may just as well leave his money to you, who will make a good use of it, as to anyone else, and it by no means follows that because you are in the

house he need find out your artist tendency; you concealed it pretty well before."

"It is not that," he answered, "that troubles me," and as he spoke he twisted old Vansittart's letter nervously in his hand; "it is that I am sure these arrangements he speaks of, are something with which I ought to have nothing to do; something that, if I stand firm, will cause a difference between us; and you know," he added, fixing his eyes upon me with an expression of mute distress that to me always seemed intensely touching, "I find it so hard to be firm, even when I know what is right. In fact, I fear he will tempt me to do wrong, I feel such a strange disinclination to this visit. It is as if I had a presentiment that something bad was going to happen to me."

Cecil had often hinted that he knew of his infirmity of character, but had never spoken of it so plainly as now. I was puzzled what to say; it was evident for some reason he dreaded the visit; yet to ordinary powers of observation, it would have seemed madness that he should risk displeasing his uncle, who certainly

appeared to mean well by him, for some foolish caprice that he called a presentiment.

I did not believe in such things myself, and I answered accordingly: "Nonsense, man. You are in low spirits, because you are enjoying yourself here, and know you will not enjoy yourself there; at least you think you will not, but it may be better than you expect. Come, cheer up, I insist on your going. Walk off to James this minute, and ask for leave, I daresay he'll be able to give it you; and you take it so seldom, you are really entitled to it now. I believe you will find everything better than you expect; have some stunning partridge-shooting, and come back quite in love with the old boy. And if you see my mother, just tell her you know her young hopeful, and you will always be welcome at Longhurst after that. I will tell them to ask you over for some shooting, which will help to pass away the time you must spend with your uncle.

So I overruled the poor fellow's wavering mind, and saw him off by the early train next day. He looked quite solemn, and no one would have imagined, to see him, that he was going

on leave to a wealthy uncle, and to put up at such a place as Beaumanoir.

His spirits rose, however, as he proceeded on his journey, and by the time he reached the station nearest his uncle's place, and was met by a dog-cart drawn by two dashing bays, he had reasoned himself, or more probably veered round without reasoning, as it was in the nature of his mind to do, into very high spirits, seeing everything in the best possible light, and quite prepared to think that Mr. Vansittart might have entirely changed in every way, and might be about to appear in the character of an estimable and praiseworthy member of society. His views on this point were certainly a little damped by an incident that occurred on the journey, shortly before they arrived at Deenham station, where he was to get out. There was a fine-looking, middle-aged gentleman travelling in the same carriage with him; they had been together all the way from London, and had fallen into conversation. Egerton was a good talker, a man of many ideas, though they were too often of a chimerical, unpractical nature. They were interesting, however, as exhibiting

the workings of an ardent, enthusiastic imagination, which, however, bore the impress of the warping agencies of his early life. Conversation between him and a stranger must always have been suggestive; his accent, manner, education, appearance, dress, all bore the impress of wealth, and of wealth as known among refined, social circles, not as it might have been found among wealthy manufacturing society; yet in every word, look, and tone was expressed an intimate knowledge of, and sympathy with, hardship and suffering. The pain-stricken, miserable early years had left their mark on his impressionable nature, and even were it possible he should ever forget them, he could not efface their traces, which were woven into his existence. You could see there was some sad history written on that grave, thoughtful brow, looking out behind the merriest glance of those gentle, wistful eyes; and seeing thus much, and no farther, strangers were usually both attracted and puzzled by the handsome young soldier.

When they arrived near Deenham, the stranger, seeing they were both about to leave together, said, "We are coming to the same part

of the country, it is possible we may meet ; I do not know your face in the county, so I suppose you are visiting somewhere. Will you tell me where you are staying ?”

“ I am going to my uncle, Mr. Vansittart, at Beaumanoir,” answered Egerton.

A very perceptible change passed over the stranger’s face on hearing Mr. Vansittart’s name; he almost seemed to draw back for a minute, as he replied, “ Mr. Vansittart’s nephew, are you ? I should not have thought it. In that case, I fear we are not likely to meet—I do not know him—our places are so far apart. Good morning,” he added, stepping out, as the train stopped, and hurrying away to a nicely turned out, quiet-looking dog-cart, that was waiting for him, and on which Cecil, following him to get to his own trap, recognised the Traverscourt crest. “ So that is Madcap’s father ; I thought I knew the face,” he mused ; “ but he would have nothing to say to me, once he knew I belonged to Beaumanoir. How strange it is that people will visit other people’s offences on innocent heads ; my uncle being the man he is, is no reason I should be a social pariah too ; but in this county, at least,

it is evident we must sink or swim together."

This reflection, though at first bitter to him, presently hardened him a little, as he sped along behind the two dashing bays, with the low August sunshine flinging long shadows of tree, and cottage, and well-filled rickyard across his path, as they passed swiftly through prosperous English hamlets, and rolled gaily along the wide level road, so different from the irregular winding hilly ways he had been used to travel on lately.

The sun had not yet set when he reached Beaumanoir, and all the western windows of the grand old building were ablaze with crimson light as he drove up; but he hardly glanced at a scene that should have charmed his artist eye. He had during the drive persuaded himself that his uncle was not as bad as public opinion would make him out—that he was, in fact, suffering for misdeeds of former years; and that since they two were condemned together, he at least being guiltless, he must endeavour to be more to the old man, to bear more with him, and from him, than he had ever done before; to forget the past and live only in a

noble and better future. Full of these resolves, his eyes dwelt only on a figure that he could discern waiting on the door steps, and that he recognised as that of his uncle. Springing to the ground as soon as he had pulled up, he stepped towards him quickly, holding out an eager hand to meet the one his uncle, somewhat more slowly, extended to him. He had no reason to complain of coldness in that hand-clasp; the old wrinkled fingers closed on his with the strength of steel, as Mr. Vansittart said, with a low laugh,

"I knew you would come. Trust me for being able to fetch any man when I want him. You made sure of the old place, my boy, when I said I wanted to consult you about some arrangements, and you came then fast enough, though you haven't cared to see me all these years, when there has been nothing to gain by it. But it is not that yet, lad, though if you do as I wish it will lead to it. It is something else I have to speak to you about, and which I think you will do for me. I see you are getting more knowledge of the world; you are not quite such a fool as you were—not quite!"

Thus muttering, and laughing at intervals, the low, cunning laugh that had always been so repulsive to Egerton, Mr. Vansittart led him into the house, not leaving him time to say a word to exonerate himself from the suspicion of interested motives that his uncle had chosen to cast upon him. He had not intended his obedience to ensure him advantage, and he had not contemplated the possibility of others thinking such a motive had actuated him. He was disgusted; all his good resolutions, all his new-born pity, and desire to like this man, vanished at once; he felt only the old inborn antagonism between their natures, the feeble but pure and good principle in his, shrinking with loathing and repulsion from the strong and wicked energy of the other character, which he felt instinctively was powerful enough to destroy and overwhelm his weak resistance in time. His only safety was in silence; he felt himself right, but he dared not express his rectitude, knowing that any such attempt would be sneered at, and his feeble defence torn to shreds, by the keen, ready satire of his opponent.

They stood by the fire in the drawing-room,

the young man looking thoughtfully into the flickering blaze, telling himself he had made a great mistake in leaving Belmurphy ; the elder, with his back to the fire, gazing sideways with a cunning leer at his nephew's troubled face. Neither spoke for a few minutes ; then Mr. Vansittart went on again :

“ You don't ask me why I brought you all this way ; you don't ask me what I have to say to you. Upon my word, you have very little curiosity. You are right, though, for I should not tell you anything yet. This is not the time to talk business. After dinner we will do that ; when the wine is in the wit is out, remember. I want you to bring your wits out, in a different way from that meant by the proverb, and use them a little on the matter in hand. You know your way to your room. That is the dressing-bell ; we will have dinner in half an hour. Tell me if everything is not comfortable ; but I think they know me better here than not to make all my guests comfortable, especially the heir that is to be.”

And the old man laughed his low, mocking laugh, as he spoke the last words. He seemed

to have an unaccountable pleasure in always reverting to that supposition. In point of fact, he believed it to be the chain that held his bond-slave, and he liked to hear it clank. He had pulled it a little too hard then. Egerton turned on him with a white face of intense passion.

“I don’t know why you are always taunting me about being your heir, speaking as though I desired it, or thought it was to be. I neither desire it nor think it. You have given me a profession that pleases me; I neither ask nor expect more from you, and for that, so far as circumstances permit me, I am grateful. But you shall not suppose that I am bound to you by hope of further reward. I regret that I came here at all, and I will leave again to-morrow. I will bear insult from no man, least of all from you, to whom, if much beholden in gratitude, I owe also a larger debt of hate.”

Mr. Vansittart drew back a little as his nephew spoke, and stood looking at him with a kind of admiration for the spirit that could lead a man to risk so much on account of a few sneering words. He liked Cecil then better

than he had ever liked him, and was the more determined to carry out the plan he had formed concerning him.

"Don't be so angry, Cecil," he answered, soothingly. "I had no idea you were such a firebrand. I was only laughing at the way in which everyone about here puts you down as my heir. I don't mean to say that you have ever counted on it, though you may do so, if you please me in the arrangements I wish to propose to you after dinner. You are not a bad-looking fellow, Cecil, and do credit to the family beauty, which was not well represented in my person. You are a little bit of an actor," he added, laughing good-humouredly. "Confess all that tragedy business just now was not quite real, just a little bit made up for the occasion."

"It was real, every bit," answered Cecil, stoutly. "I don't know what you mean by saying I am an actor. I trust, at least, I shall never act what I don't believe in and feel."

He turned into his room as he spoke, shutting the door sharply behind him, and the old man continued his way down the corridor, muttering,

“Acting, certainly, whatever he says; too earnest to be real. Good acting, though—very good; might make his fortune on the stage, if he doesn’t turn out to be my heir.”

Laughing to himself at this observation, that for some reason or other always appeared to afford him intense amusement, Mr. Vansittart proceeded to his room, leaving Cecil trying in solitude to calm the angry, rebellious feelings that would rise in his heart.

It was hard indeed that the only one in the world with whom he could claim kin, the one with whom he must be intimately associated, was the impersonation of everything that he had been taught from childhood to scorn and avoid. His mother, gentle in all other things, had been strict in her moral training, and had held up before her child’s eyes the highest standard of perfection as the one after which he was to follow. And it had been easier for him to do so than for most people, because all the love he had ever met with, all the affection he had ever bestowed, was intimately connected with, and wound round, purity and goodness, nobility of mind and unswerving truth. In those respects,

parental example supported and encouraged him, and the memory of those lost urged him constantly forward in the right way.

Dinner passed over quietly. It seemed that Mr. Vansittart, either frightened at Cecil's outburst on his way upstairs, or desirous of soothing him before approaching the matter in hand, exerted himself to be agreeable, and actually for a time almost succeeded in keeping his hateful philosophy out of sight. The deference thus shown to his opinions, the good dinner, and the handsome, appropriate surroundings, all exercised their influence on young Egerton, who began again to waver in his feelings to his uncle, and grew more sociable and cheerful as time passed on. When they were left alone with their wine and fruit, he had got quite lively, relating anecdotes connected with his regiment, and enjoying the old man's keen wit very fully, now that it was unmingled with the cynicism that had made it so unpleasant. He did not notice that his uncle's keen grey eyes watched him slyly and unceasingly; he did not observe that, as his spirits rose, a triumphant expression overspread the old man's face: he

was too much taken up with thoughts of his absent comrades, their sayings and doings, and his as mixed up with theirs, to pay any attention to the sinister expression of his companion's face.

After he had rattled on for some time, however, his uncle interposed.

"Suppose we come to business now, Cecil?" he said. "Of course you know it was not for the pleasure of your society I brought you over here, though I must acknowledge you are more amusing than I expected to find you. No, I had another object, as I told you before; and I think, as we are in a talking humour, I may as well explain it to you; but let us look at your position calmly and clearly, considering first what it is, and secondly what it may be. You are an ensign in Her Majesty's —th,—near the top of the ensigns, you say? I am glad to hear it; but it doesn't much alter the position with regard to the matter in hand. For your commission, as well as your education, you are indebted to me. I don't want to boast of it—I merely mention it as a fact; and when you want to purchase a step, I must do it for you. So far,

so good. You have, we see, absolutely nothing of your own, except your pay, and you have the prospect of nothing, except what I shall choose to give you, either in purchasing your steps or making you my heir, as we were talking of before dinner, when I made you so angry. Don't be annoyed; I am not telling you this with any desire to irritate you—merely as a matter of business between two men of the world. Well, it now seems that all your future prospects rest with me, and I am willing to do the best I can for you, hoping that you will be a credit to the family, and designing for you this heirship you so indignantly repudiated to-day, if you please me in the matter I shall presently refer to. Situated as you are, the course most natural to a young and good-looking fellow like you, who has not a halfpenny he can really call his own, is a wealthy marriage. Have you ever thought of marrying?—and if so, have you considered how important it is that the lady should have money?”

“Indeed, sir,” answered Cecil, the colour rising to his brow as he began to see the drift of his uncle's observations, “I have never given either

of those subjects any consideration. A fellow of my age is too young to think of marriage."

Mr. Vansittart nodded his head approvingly.

"In an ordinary case you are right," he answered; "if there was no money to be obtained it would be quite simple—you would wait, perhaps never marry at all; but where there is money to be had, the matter is different; and it is on this account I asked you over."

"I don't think it likely I shall ever marry for money," replied Egerton, coldly—"indeed, I may as well say at once I will not; and besides, I number no heiresses among my acquaintance."

"But what if I do—what if I do?" repeated Mr. Vansittart, laughing softly. "Of course that first speech of yours is the proper thing to say, and I applaud it, but it is humbug—arrant humbug—all the same; and you will agree with me that it is so, when you see the young lady in question."

"I have said before, uncle, I will not marry for money, and seeing the young lady will not

alter my determination; besides which, it is hardly possible she would care to buy for a husband such an outcast as I am."

The old man laughed.

"I don't know about that, of course," he said, "though I don't think you look like a fellow a girl would refuse; but the beauty of the whole thing is that, if she will have you, you need not marry her for money at all, but only for love—for love of the prettiest woman in four counties round. It is time enough to say you won't have her when you have seen her; wait till then, my boy, and I have no fear but you will be as anxious for the match as I am. And then, if you two settle it between you, and all goes on well, then I promise to make you my heir; so you need not fear their saying you are looking after her gold, for you will have as much in prospect as she has. Is not that worth thinking about, young man?"

And Mr. Vansittart peered cunningly into his nephew's gloomy face as he finished speaking.

"I am not given to falling in love," answered the young man at length, "so it is not probable this young lady will have as powerful an effect

on me as you seem to anticipate. But you have not told me her name. I may as well know that, even if the matter does not turn out as you wish."

"Miss Prendergast—Mabel Prendergast," repeated the old man. "A pretty name, but not half as pretty as the woman that owns it."

"But, if she is so beautiful and such an heir-ess, how is it she is not caught already? Probably there is some one hanging after her to whom she is attached, so I might as well spare myself the pain of seeing her and falling in love with her."

"She is very young—only just out of the school-room, and has been out to none of the county festivities; that is how it happens that she has not a swarm of men after her. Few people as yet know about her; and besides, there is another reason—there is some kind of arrangement between her people and Lady Feversham. Lady Feversham wants her for her son; but I don't know that the young people think anything of that arrangement, and I fancy you would have as much chance as he.

To my mind you are far better-looking, and, if she will take you, will have more money than he, though no title."

"She is intended for Lord Feversham, is she?" cried Claude, startled out of the reserve he had intended to maintain in that county respecting his Captain's love-affair. "Feversham won't go in for her, I know."

"What do you know about it at all?" questioned Mr. Vansittart eagerly. "Oh! I remember—Lord Feversham is in your regiment; but how does that tell you what may be his intentions with regard to Miss Prendergast?"

"How I know it does not much matter," Cecil replied, "and as it is not my secret I cannot explain further. I ought not to have said so much. But I know quite well he has no intention of marrying her, whatever Lady Feversham intends for him."

"That makes it all the easier for you. You might have tried to persuade me that you had some absurd scruples about cutting out your friend—scruples that I should not have believed, as I think men would rather do a thing of that kind than go in for a woman about

whom there was no competition. However, this settles it very comfortably for you, and I am glad to see you are much more reasonable about it than I had expected."

"Don't call me reasonable, please," interrupted Cecil, "for that means that you expect me to do as you wish, and I warn you that it is ten thousand chances to one that I do not do so. I only consent to see this girl that you may not say I did not try, as far as lay in my power, to please you; and if you had not promised to make me her equal in fortune I would have avoided her, and not have laid myself open to the risk of a love which all the world would believe feigned, and impute to mercenary motives."

"Very well," answered the old man. "Of course that is the right thing to say, though how you can believe it, after having been so long knocking about the world, I cannot imagine. If it is a blind, you might as well do without it, and speak as freely to me as I to you; but somehow I fancy you really do mean what you say, which is an entirely inconceivable infatuation and folly. The difficulty now is, how you

are to meet this girl. The people hereabouts, who are no whit better than myself in reality, but who do not express their opinions as openly, turn up their noses at me generally; not that the gentlemen are not very glad to know me, and come to my little dinners, and ask for my vote at their meetings, and so on, but for the most part they do not introduce me to their ladies. But I think I can get the Pearsons to do it for me. They are very neighbourly as a rule, and they know these Prendergasts. I will take you to call there to-morrow. I know they are giving a lot of parties now, and they will be glad to have a handsome young gentleman to put in an appearance at their croquet-parties, and to dance with their young ladies at their balls. And now let us go into the next room to our coffee."

The day after the last recorded conversation between Feversham and myself he wrote to his mother, and showed me the letter; for curiously enough his knowledge that I cared for the same girl, and also a consciousness that, were my people to get wind of the affair, they would act

in precisely the same way towards me as his mother had done towards him, drew us more closely together, causing him to choose me as his confidant on a subject which, under other circumstances, he would have hidden most jealously from a declared rival.

And I felt very strangely about it. His confidence in me pleased and touched me; he did not regard me as a mere boy evidently, or he would not have taken me into all his secrets, and yet it annoyed me in other respects, showing, as it so plainly did, that he regarded my feelings as being neither deep nor permanent.

I listened to his difficulties, however, and his plans for surmounting them, only buoyed up by this thought, that nothing was known yet of her feelings, and it was but a chance that she would take him; more particularly—I thought with a little secret pleasure I could not in any way suppress—more particularly now that he was a poor man.

Claude's letter to his mother was manly and determined, though respectful; if I had been obliged to answer such an epistle as hers had

been, I am afraid I should hardly have been so calm and deferential; but then Claude tells me I am more passionate than he ever was, and, besides, have not yet been tamed by the world. He told her in every other act of his life he should be happy to receive her advice, and might almost promise to act on it, but in this one matter he, and none other, must be the judge. "Consider," he said, "that it involves the happiness of my life; if I take a wife because you like her and recommend her, or because she has money, or title, or any other worldly advantage, what guarantee is there that we shall be able to get on happily together? But if I choose her because her disposition suits mine, and we love one another, we have at least a fair prospect of happiness. As to Miss Bambridge, you know nothing of her, and if you allow yourself to be prejudiced against her by any aversion to the country of her birth, you are very wrong. Hold over all judgment on the matter until you see her, then if you do not withdraw your opposition I shall be very much surprised. Understand, however, that whether you give your consent or not, if Miss Bambridge will take

me I will marry her ; not that I wish to offend you, but that I cannot consider any interference in such a matter justifiable, at least when the person is of an age to judge for himself. At present Miss Bambridge is in Dublin, and will be there for a week or two ; as soon as she returns, however, I shall show her your letter, and ask her if she will have me, knowing I am a poor man, with nothing to offer her but a true heart."

Something such as this was the purport of Claude's letter, and I could not help thinking what he said very true. It does seem to me hard that parents should interfere in the marriage of their children, since it is not the old people who will have to live with the wife chosen for her money, or good blood, without respect to temper or disposition : they will not be the sufferers if she turns out cold and irritating, or frivolous and extravagant ; therefore I think the person who is to suffer from her whims and caprices, or be made happy by her smiles and caresses, should at least be the one to choose the partner with whom he is to live.

When Lady Feversham received this letter she was greatly perplexed; Mabel Prendergast was still with her, and she threw it towards her saying, "Read that. I knew perfectly well he would not believe my threat of disinheritance, and you can see such is the case, for he takes no notice of it. What shall I do? He seems quite determined to have his own way in the matter."

Mabel picked up the letter and read it slowly and deliberately; she paused a minute or two after she had finished, whilst Lady Feversham waited anxiously to hear what advice she would give.

"What is to be done?" she asked at last, as Mabel stirred her coffee absently.

The girl looked up hurriedly. "Ah! I forgot. I should see Miss Bambridge myself if I were you, and represent the matter to her; if she loves him, I should tell her she was ruining his prospects in life if she took him, for that you had designed greater things for him, and would never forgive him if he disobeyed you. If she does not care for him the course is simple enough; she will not take him once she hears he has no

money. Yes, if I were you I should see the girl myself; he says she is in Dublin now, I think the object you have in view would be well worth a trip over there. Don't you?"

"Well, but when I get to Dublin how am I to find her?" asked the old lady, pettishly.

"That is what I was thinking of," continued Mabel, not noticing her friend's tone. "I should say your best plan would be to write a line to Lady Longwreath, asking her to find out their address. She knows numbers of people who know them, and who will tell where they are, and how long they intend to remain in Dublin. Will you do it?"

"I suppose I had better," answered Lady Feversham. "I will do it now. You will be riding this morning, I suppose, and can post it?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "I am going to have a scamper, and the morning is so lovely I have ordered the horse in half an hour. Shall you be ready by that time?"

About an hour after this conversation had taken place, Mabel ran into her mother's boudoir at The Poplars.

"Here I am, mamma," she said, after the

first embracing was over, throwing herself negligently on to the sofa, and tapping the tip of her boot with her riding-whip. "Have you been wanting me the last day or two?"

"We are dull without you, Mabel dear. Indeed, your papa was very anxious to send for you a day or two ago, but I stopped him. I said if he ever wished to see you Lady Feversham, he must be content to do without you for a little now, as it pleases her ladyship to have you."

"Well, there does not seem to me to be much chance of my ever being Lord Claude's wife. I told you he had fallen in love with some Irish girl, didn't I?—and that her ladyship had written to tell him if he married her she would disinherit him. She got an answer to her letter to-day, in which he told several truths that are very much against my chances of success. He intends to tell this girl how he stands with his mother, and that if she marries him he will be a poor man, at the same time asking her to take him, if she cares enough for him to bear poverty for his sake. (If I met a man who could say that to me, supposing I was as poor as Miss Bambridge,

I should love him for it.) Then he tells his mother she has no right to prevent him pleasing himself in such a matter; that it is he who will have to bear the consequences of a mistake, if a mistake is made in the choice of a wife, and that therefore he considers he should please himself only in the matter. He is quite right, you know, mother. If I did not wish it myself, you'd never get me to take anyone you chose; and if I saw anyone I liked better than Claude Feversham to-morrow, I would take him, and leave his lordship to be happy with his Irish lady-love."

"Good gracious, child, how you do run on!" cried Mrs. Prendergast, a comely, good-natured-looking woman, who seemed as if she took the world very easily. "I am sure I don't know where you pick up those queer ideas, and those strange independent manners. I know it is not from me, and your father was never like that since I have known him."

"You took it out of him, mamma dear, as Lord Claude is to take it out of me, I suppose. After all, I wonder why I help Lady Feversham about this. I declare I think it is a love of mis-

chief, and nothing better, drives me on. It is rather pleasant to be making or marring a man's life, when he thinks you are the simplest, most insignificant child going. I told them to have 'Stole Away' ready for me in half an hour, I want to give him a gallop on the hills, up near Farmer Morton's, you know. There he is at the door, the beauty! I will be off; but I shall lunch here before going back to the Castle."

So saying, she ran down to the door, where a magnificent brown-black thoroughbred hunter was waiting for her.

"He's very fresh, Miss," said the groom holding him, as she approached. "He threw Jim Matthews a few days ago and broke his leg. Since then no one has mounted him, Miss, and he seems rale wicked to-day."

So he did, indeed, as he rolled his eye, showing the white ominously, and laid back his ears on his smooth, firm neck, as she came forward.

Mabel Prendergast, however, was not easily frightened by such demonstrations, but patted his sleek shoulder before she mounted, with her usual careless indifference as to what might be the temper or disposition of the animal.

Once in the saddle, the reins in hand, and "You may let go," said to the groom, it became apparent that "Stole Away" was not in the most amiable frame of mind. Setting up his powerful back with a squeal, and lashing his hind quarters viciously, he executed a series of vigorous buck-jumps, varied by violent kicking at intervals. It was pretty evident such was the process by which he had been accustomed to dislodge the grooms, and he hoped to dispose of his young mistress just as effectively.

The lawn before them was open, only a few large trees growing here and there, while at the further end it was bounded by a sunk fence and wide ditch; once over that, the country was almost open, rising in sunny pasture slopes up to the very summits of the hills that bounded the view in that direction. All this Mabel knew well enough; so, after a few moments, during which she kept her seat like a Centaur, in spite of the furious efforts made to get rid of her, she turned the horse's head in the right direction, and bringing down her whip with stinging force across his quarters, darted forward like an arrow from a bow, and sitting

well down, piloted the flying steed through the clumps of timber towards the sunk fence and ditch before mentioned. As she neared the leap, she tried to take a pull on the horse and get him together; he was running away, or would have been had she tried to stop him; but having been left free till then, and seeing what was before him, he steadied a little into his stride on feeling himself taken by the head, and went at it gallantly. There was a great drop over the ditch on the far side, and altogether it was a biggish place; but Mabel had crossed it many a time before, and worse things too, on that same horse "Stole Away." It was not the leap, therefore, that caused her to utter a half-stifled cry as her horse threw himself well forward over it; the object that caused her so much alarm as to startle her out of her usual composure, was the figure of a man lying in the ditch close to the spot where she crossed it. But that "Stole Away" swerved in his jump as he caught sight of the prostrate figure, Mabel might not have remarked it; but even in the short glimpse she obtained of it, before her horse carried her wildly onward, she was aware that something

was wrong with the man lying there. The confused, huddled-up attitude prompted her to return and find out what assistance was needed. But it was not an easy matter to stop her startled steed or reduce him to obedience, and being in a large pasture-field, she soon found the quickest way to accomplish her purpose would be to give the fiery animal a gallop before taking him back to the fence by which the man was lying. Round the field they went, startling the sleepy herds of cattle into menacing groups; but still "Stole Away," stout of wind and limb, showed no disposition to halt in his wild career; she was too full of a kind of undefined anxiety to be pleased with what, at any other time, she would have enjoyed immensely.

At length, after an apparently interminable gallop, she felt that her steed would be willing to stand should she find it necessary to dismount, and turning, she rode at once to the place where the man lay. He was there still, she could see as she approached, lying without motion or sign of life; Mabel's heart almost stopped beating, with apprehension, as she ad-

vanced slowly towards him. When she stood beside him, everything that had puzzled and alarmed her was at once explained.

The fence was one of the kind known as a sunk fence, and the higher side was faced with massive stonework. The ditch being deep and wide, it was evident the man, who no doubt had intended to cross the fence, had not tried to jump, but had endeavoured to climb, and had caught hold of one of the large stones that faced the higher bank, by which to pull himself up. This stone, loosened by action of water or some other cause, had given way, and had rolled on top of him as he fell backwards.

It lay a heavy, crushing mass on his chest; but how long it had lain there, and whether the sufferer was dead or not Mabel could not say; she only remembered that the spot was unfrequented, and, had she not happened to pass, the body might have remained there for days longer; for that he was either dead or insensible was evident. His face was partially hidden by one hand; the only lifelike thing about him was his thick brown hair, that fluttered a little in the breeze, his hat having fallen off. Beside

him, also, lay a small book, the leaves of which, turning over with a faint sound, allowed Mabel to catch sight of pencilled and coloured outlines here and there amid its pages.

"An artist," she thought; "what shall I do? I must go home for assistance."

Turning the now submissive thorough-bred to a more practicable place, she went over and quickly arrived at the house.

It did not take long to tell her story and send men to the relief of the stranger, who was presently brought in, still insensible, and carried to the room Mabel had already caused to be got ready for him.

"We can do no less, mamma," she answered, when her mother remonstrated, on the ground that they did not know who he was. "I found him; we must do all that lies in our power for him. Send Jacob for the doctor at once," she went on, addressing the footman, who had answered her peremptory peal on the bell.

"It all comes of your riding those frightful horses, my dear," moaned Mrs. Prendergast. "I always thought you would kill yourself, but

it seems you have found some one else killed instead."

"Nonsense, mamma; he isn't dead," answered Mabel, rather crossly—all the more crossly because she was horribly afraid her mother spoke the truth. "Ah! here they are with him. He had better be laid on the bed at once, and we must try to bring him round before the doctor comes."

But all their efforts to revive him were for long unavailing, even after the doctor joined them; when at length he did open his eyes, it was only to close them again in another swoon. He seemed weak, the doctor thought, as though he had lain in the field some time; but after a little brandy had been administered his breathing became more regular, and his pulse stronger.

When Dr. Sims joined the ladies afterwards, he told them he apprehended no danger, if fever did not set in; the most serious injury was the very severe contusion he had received in the chest, but he had no doubt time and care would cure him completely—make him as strong as ever he was; "or indeed stronger," he added,

with a laugh. "It seems to me he is a traveling artist—a gentlemanly looking fellow, for all that."

"What's his name, doctor?" asked Mabel. "Did he tell you?"

"He has not spoken at all yet," replied the doctor—"indeed, the less he speaks the better for some time; but I found a letter in his pocket addressed to Cecil Egerton, Esq., Beaumanoir, Blankshire, so I presume he is staying with Mr. Vansittart. I shall write to that gentleman when I go home, to see if I can find out anything about him."

"Yes, and you may have his things sent here," said Mabel, eagerly, "as it will be some time before he can move, I imagine."

"Very well," answered Dr. Sims, bustling down to his gig as he spoke. "I will call again to-morrow."

"Now what am I to do, mamma?" asked Mabel, when the village medico had disappeared. "It is not fair to leave you all the burden of this man I have brought home, so I think I had better leave Lady Feversham for the present and return here. He is too much of a gentle-

man, I think, at least in appearance, to leave him entirely to servants ; it would not be kind. It is a great bore, all the same," she went on. "I was advising Lady Feversham about this business of Lord Claude's, and now it will all be in a muddle, unless I ride over there every day."

"Well, you can do that, darling," answered her father, who had come into the room whilst she was speaking. "I have been looking at this young fellow, and he seems a gentleman from his appearance. He is lying quite quiet, with his eyes closed, but I think not sleeping. He seems to breathe with difficulty ; but the doctor says he will get over it soon. Do you know how it happened, dear?"

Then she related how she imagined it had happened, and ended by saying,

"It is most provoking I should have been the person to discover him. It is fearfully disagreeable having a man of whom you know nothing sick in your house, particularly under these circumstances, as it obliges you to be civil. However, it can't last so very long. I suppose a month will see our trouble over.

Now I will gallop back to the Castle and explain it all to her ladyship; but I will return in the evening."

Lady Feversham was in great distress when she heard her young ally must leave her. She felt it quite impossible that, without Mabel's assistance, she could bring the matter to a successful termination.

"And besides," she went on, "I really don't see the necessity for your going home; and the man need be no burden to your mother, the housekeeper would take care of him."

"Of course," assented Mabel, somewhat impatiently; "but, you see, he seems rather too much of a gentleman to be left entirely to servants. It will be right for some of us to go and see after him now and then, and it would be rather too much to ask mamma to do it always, when I brought him into the house. As to your business, however, I will ride over every morning, and then we can settle what had best be done. I posted your letter to Lady Longwreath, but we can't have an answer that will be of any use to our plans for at least a week."

So it was arranged that Mabel should return

home, but that she was still to be the governing spirit of Lady Feversham's schemes. She rode away that afternoon a little annoyed and worried at her morning's adventure, yet not wholly displeased at it, since it afforded a pretext for leaving the Castle, where she was beginning to get rather bored.

"Stole Away" was quiet enough by this time, and the young girl, laying the reins on his neck, followed the road homewards, absorbed in reverie. It was a lovely evening early in September, the sun, low down in the horizon, threw long shadows of the horse and his rider over bank and hedge-row, as she passed along; the clouds floated high in the still heavens, blazing with crimson and gold; the trees, already beginning to don the richest Autumn tints, hardly rustled a leaf in the still evening air; while, all along the white, dusty road, cattle were wending their way homewards, or parties of labourers returning from their work, touched their hats respectfully to the Squire's young lady. She was well known to them all, and a favourite with most, for she showed no haughtiness of disposition towards her inferiors, and being of a

generous disposition, with plenty of money at her command, she took a pleasure in relieving any want that came under her notice. Besides, she could ride as few even of the men in the county could, and her daring awoke a warm feeling of admiration in the country bumpkins, who sometimes watched her rapid flight across the country.

But this evening she took very little notice of their respectful salutations; her mind was fully occupied with other things. First, there was this business of Claude Feversham's. Should they win, and might she hope some day to have him at her feet?—or would he carry his purpose, as, indeed, she well believed he had strength of will to do?

After all, if Lady Feversham could find the girl's address, it would depend more on her character than on Claude's will; but if she loved him as he did her, it was more than probable she would regard her lover's entreaties more than his mother's threats.

Then her thoughts reverted to the morning's adventure.

"So stupid," she muttered, drawing her whip

across her horse's neck with a threatening gesture, but without striking him. "It was your being so wild, you old fool, that caused me to discover him. I must take care to give you plenty of exercise, or you will be mad before the hunting begins."

Then she wondered what the stranger might be like; she had not seen his face, shaded as it was by his hand when she rode up, and afterwards, in the bustle and confusion, she had not noticed it.

She only remembered heavy masses of dark wavy hair, cut rather short, and a white, delicately-formed hand; not at all the hand of one accustomed to rough it, and labour for his daily bread—rather it seemed suited to a dreamer or a poet. As she thought of this, Mabel wondered more and more who he could be, and what brought him there.

It was almost dinner-hour when she reached The Poplars; running upstairs, she began to dress quickly, ringing for her old nurse, who was also her maid, as she did so. Her bell was answered by one of the other servants, whom she asked sharply why nurse did not attend to

her. The girl replied that nurse was in the sick gentleman's room, but she would send her to Miss Mabel at once.

"No, no," cried Mabel, hastily; "you will do very well for what I want now. I can stop and speak to nurse as I pass the room. It is rather a bore having one's maid turned into a sick-nurse," she grumbled, as she went on dressing.

Shortly after, on her way downstairs, she knocked gently at the door of the invalid's room, and looking in noiselessly, asked how he was doing.

"Pretty much the same, miss," replied the nurse. "He has neither spoken nor moved since the doctor saw him last."

"Well, I just came to speak to you about the dress you are making for me," continued Mabel. "I was thinking, when I was out to-day, that I should like little flounces all up the back, and not a bunched-up panier, as everyone wears now. Do you think you can manage that? It was better to tell you at once, for fear you might cut the stuff the other way."

"Very well, miss," answered the nurse; "you only just spoke in time, as I had laid out to cut

the panier to-night. I have not seen any dresses made that way, but if you can show me one of the fashion pictures, I daresay I shall be able to manage it."

"You'll find *Le Follet* in my room," answered Mabel, "and there is a plate of the very thing I want. I suppose the gentleman is insensible, as you say he has not spoken or moved since he came, nurse. What is he like, I had no opportunity of getting a look at his face?"

As she spoke Mabel noiselessly crossed the room and stood by the bedside, while nurse took up again the work she had laid down and answered :

"He is a nice-looking young gentleman enough, Miss, if he was stronger, but he must have been lying out there some time, the doctor thinks, before you found him; and he is that wasted you could blow him away if you had a mind to do so."

Mabel smiled as she listened to nurse's opinion, and mentally passed her own while she looked at his haggard pallid countenance, which was handsome in spite of suffering. As she stood thus he opened his eyes wearily, and at

first there was no meaning or purpose in his gaze ; it was simply a vacant stare. By degrees, however, an expression of pleasure dawned over his weary pain-altered face ; he did not attempt to speak, but his look followed Mabel as she turned away. When she left the room he closed his eyes with a sigh, and she went down stairs musing,

“How handsome he is ! Who can he be ?—a gentleman evidently, with that face and those hands, but who ?”

A question not to be answered, at least at present, so she descended to the drawing-room, and was rather more meditative even than usual that night ; but her parents were used to their little daughter's fits of abstraction, and her absent manner passed unnoticed.

CHAPTER XI.

A FASCINATING ACQUAINTANCE.

IN the meantime, we on duty in Ireland began to have rather hard times of it. The Fenian agitation was recommencing in preparation for the Winter, at which time they were always most troublesome. We were perpetually being confined to barracks, besides being obliged to be much more strict in the performance of our duties than we had been ever since we entered these jolly country quarters. It was very hard to be up to them ; they had so many ways of disguising themselves and going about, and the government was so awfully frightened of them, a great deal more so than the necessities of the case warranted. We were fearfully

bored at not being able to go out at night when we wished, it being necessary always to leave some of us in charge of the barracks; indeed we seldom got any distance from the town now, for fear of sudden calls being made for us, not that we should have been of much use in case of a rising, I apprehend, as in such a difficulty the orders were that we should shut ourselves up in barracks.

Under these circumstances, it did not so much matter the Bambridges being away, as we could not have got over there often; so we amused ourselves as best we could, playing billiards and lounging about the town.

The billiard-room was in the hotel, and was a very constant resort of ours every afternoon; we generally met some one or two of the country gentlemen there, and really there was nothing better to do than getting up matches between ourselves and them, which was done without much loss on either side, none of us being very first-rate player.

One afternoon, however, when Flower and I entered the billiard-room, we found it occupied by a gentlemanly-looking man, who was knock-

ing about the balls by himself, and who apparently did not find that amusement lively, for on our approach he laid down his cue, and asked if we were about to have a game. Now Flower and I were so ill matched, that is to say, he was such a bad player that it had become somewhat monotonous my constantly winning ; I therefore answered that if the stranger would play a game with me it would give me great pleasure, and Flower would mark for us.

I don't think Baby half liked being ordered to mark, but he is rather afraid of me, so he assented somewhat sullenly and we set to work. Our unknown friend was not only a splendid player, soon making me repent of my weakness in challenging him, but he was also a very liberal, friendly kind of fellow, called for champagne, and invited us to drink with him in a way that plainly showed he had money at his command, and was not one of the poor tourists that are most frequently to be seen at country hotels, in the west of Ireland.

He beat me of course ; then he played with Flower, giving him a good lot of points, and beat him with equal ease ; after that Feversham having

come in, they began a game, but here he found himself better matched, and it was a very close struggle between them, ending however by the stranger's winning. He was a communicative fellow, called himself Mr. Maguire, and told us all about his family and fortune, where he lived, and what brought him down to Belmurphy. Then he played another game with the police inspector, who had just come in, finished him too, and after that, as it was nearly time for mess, walked part of the way back with us. This went on for some days; he was a most agreeable, gentleman-like fellow, full of fun and anecdote, and did not always win at billiards, which kept us all in a good-humour with him; it was such a triumph when one did manage to defeat a good player. As we got more intimate, he used to ask us to cosy bachelor dinners, and we in return asked him to mess one evening, as we were about to leave the hotel, after a pleasant afternoon spent there.

He accepted willingly, saying it was very lonely dining by himself, and came along with us at once.

"Have you had any trouble about those

Fenian fellows lately?" he asked, as we drew near the barracks.

"Well, you know," replied Feversham, "the government is in an awful funk about them, and really if the barracks all over the country are like these, they could not be very easily defended."

"I don't know," answered Maguire; "you see I have travelled a good deal on the continent, and have learnt something of fortification there, so perhaps if you are not above taking a hint I might give you one or two. You see the barracks stand on the summit of a high hill; it is true they are commanded by another hill over there, and you would not have troops enough to occupy that; but then these Fenians have no cannon, and without them the height beyond would serve them little. Then if I was defending this place, the first thing I should do would be to destroy all these poor houses that come close up to the walls, and that would afford cover to the enemy. Once they were removed, nothing could approach you without being exposed to your fire. However, I suppose you

know all this as well as I do. Were not those your plans?"

"Well, yes, in part," answered Feversham, "but I think we might even do a little more;" and then he proceeded to unfold his ideas for fortifying the barracks in case of a rising.

Mr. Maguire listened with attention, suggesting an improvement here, disputing the wisdom of a measure there, until we went in to dinner, when the subject dropped, and was not again resumed. "He is a clever fellow that," whispered Mayleigh to me before we sat down. "He is as well up in fortification as I am myself."

"Which would not be saying much for him," I laughed: "it seems to me he knows more than Feversham, and some of his ideas are original, though he supports them strongly."

When he was about to leave that night, our guest, whilst shaking us warmly by the hands, said that it was with great regret he bid us good-bye, as he must be off by the early train next day.

"I shall ever think with pleasure of our brief acquaintance," he added feelingly. "And

even if we don't meet, you will hear of me again."

"I am sorry he is going," we all exclaimed when he had left; "he was such a pleasant companion."

"Yes, it is quite refreshing to meet with such a clever fellow, who is not above joining in ordinary amusements," chimed in Feversham: "he has got no mean talent in the engineering line: he pointed out one or two little defects in the plans we had formed for defending the barracks."

So we all agreed we had lost a most charming acquaintance, and regretted him very much till the next afternoon, when Colonel Dropmore received an official communication, to the effect that the famous Fenian leader, Colonel Kelly, was in the town, residing at the hotel, and that immediate measures must be taken for his arrest. Then followed a description of his *personne*, in which we recognised, with unfeigned astonishment, a most accurate portrait of our agreeable billiard-playing friend.

"Well, if this isn't a pretty go!" cried Mayleigh, going into a fit of laughter; "at any rate

the bird has flown now, and he deserved to get safe off, for a bolder or cooler fellow never breathed. How well he walked into us! By Jove, I feel a good deal smaller since I heard how we were taken in!"

"It is very annoying," answered Feversham. "What a confounded set of fools we must appear to him! But, as you say, I am glad he escaped, for he was a plucky fellow, after all."

The laugh raised against us, when this became known, gave the county amusement for many days, and we had to stand a heavy fire of chaff from every man we met for a good while after.

But this was not all, even: shortly after, a man was taken up somewhere else, on the supposition that he was Colonel Kelly, and several of us had to go over to London to see if we could identify him. It was a great bore, as we were dragged over, confronted with the prisoner, who proved to be the wrong man after all, and then were sent back on the spot, not being even allowed a few days to rest and amuse ourselves among the pleasures of the great city.

"It will teach us to be more careful in choosing our acquaintance in future," said Claude, when, wearied and travel-stained, we returned again to Belmurphy; "not but that he was as good a fellow as you could meet with, and I am glad he got safe off."

In the meantime, while all this was going on down with us, Lady Feversham, after at least ten anxious days of waiting, received the required information from Lady Longwreath. The Bambridges were in lodgings in Kildare Street, the number was given, and all was ready for Lady Feversham to decide on her course of action. This, however, she could not do without first consulting Mabel Prendergast, who urged her strongly to go over and see Miss Bambridge in person.

"I will not tell you what to say," she went on; "the situation must, of course, suggest that; but if you find she is not afraid of poverty, try and get her pride up in your favour. Insinuate that you look on a match with her as a *mésalliance*, and that it will lower Lord Feversham's position in society. There—I need not tell you any more; you understand it very well,

and if you are determined to succeed, you will do so."

Lady Feversham would have liked greatly to take Mabel with her. It was a long, tiresome journey, with only her maid for a companion, but she could see plainly it would be useless asking such a thing, and so she at last made up her mind to do it by herself, with only a feeble, milk-and-water kind of woman—her maid Purcell—as a protector.

"You'll be back in two or three days?" asked Mabel, as she watched her friend get into the train, on her way up to London.

"Yes, certainly," the old lady answered, "and I hope with good news—good for you as well as me, remember."

Mabel nodded her head with a smile, but as she turned away an impatient expression overspread her face.

"Did not I tell her," she thought, "that it was not for myself I was assisting her, and less now than ever? And why less now than ever?" she asked herself, as she took her ponies' reins and turned their heads homewards. "I think I am going mad, or getting softening of the

brain, or something dreadful, when I begin to fancy even for a minute I could give up the power I might enjoy as his wife, and all because a face haunts me—as if it was not very natural a face as perfect as that one should do so! Why, it is quite a pleasure to think of it,” she mused, smiling, leaning back, and letting the ponies take their own pace homewards. “A picture would please me as well. There is a want somewhere in the face, and yet you never think of that when looking at it. Too much sweetness and tenderness, and too little strength—that is the fault. Well, there is strength enough about Lord Claude’s face, but it is nothing to look at, though I believe many people think him handsome.”

She was nearly home by this time, and, as she drew near, she whipped up the ponies, as if impatient of every moment until she reached the house; then throwing the reins to the groom, she ran upstairs to a little pleasant morning-room, where Cecil Egerton lay stretched on the sofa. He had been carried in there that day for the first time, and even that exertion seemed to have been too much for his

feeble strength, for he lay now with the western sunlight streaming over him, his eyes closed, and appearing hardly to breathe. Suddenly a shadow fell across him, and as he had done on the first night of his arrival, so now he opened his heavy eyes, which lighted up with a look of such unutterable happiness that Mabel Prendergast turned away her head, that she might not behold the unconcealed rapture that shone in his glance.

"I knew it was you," he murmured, and his soft, slow utterance spoke the same tale as his face—passionate, adoring love. "Your step is light as air, but I heard it and knew it. You have been away a long time."

"Not so long," answered Mabel, lightly, and stepping to the window she drew the blind partly down, to shade his face from the sun; then, not trusting herself to look at him, she went on gaily, "As to hearing my step, that is nonsense—it was my shadow between you and the sun aroused you."

"I should know your step among a thousand," he persisted, feebly. Then, after a pause, he whispered again, "When shall I be stronger?"

Does the doctor tell you when I shall be well?"

"Not for two or three weeks yet," she answered. "And you will not be much to boast of even then. Why are you so anxious to be well? Are you tired of being here?"

"Tired!" he repeated; and his glance, which she had turned to meet, startled the careless coquette with its deep meaning. "I am only afraid," he added, "that I shall feel my usual life unbearable after this."

"Well, do not think of it for the present," she replied—"it will be time enough to meet your troubles when they come. In the meantime, rest and be happy. Ah! here is mamma coming to see the patient. He is getting on very slowly, mamma dear, and seems tired by having been moved into this room to-day."

"I was afraid he would," answered Mrs. Prendergast; "but he seemed so very anxious for a change that at last I consented."

So saying, she sat down beside him, talking pleasantly of the little events of the day, not requiring an answer, and striving by every art in her power to cheer and entertain the invalid.

Certainly, as far as kindness and consideration

went, Cecil Egerton could not have fallen into better hands, and yet he wished sometimes bitterly that it had been his fate to die where he fell, or be picked up and succoured by the meanest labourer in the field, rather than to have been let into this paradise of beauty and love, to be turned out again in a few short weeks, deprived of the only thing that had hitherto supported him—his light, careless heart. A heavy heart indeed he was doomed to carry henceforward, for he told himself again and again it was impossible that he could ever be anything more to the bright young beauty who formed the light of his life than the stranger whom she had found injured accidentally, and whom her kindness had succoured.

So whilst Mrs. Prendergast chatted away merrily, thinking she was beguiling the weary moments of the invalid, his thoughts flew back to his uncle, and a mental review of his position passed before him. Mr. Vansittart had not come to see him when he heard what had happened, but he had written a note, which was cautiously worded, and not unkind. Cecil could tell from it, however, that his uncle con-

sidered the accident a very lucky one, or, in other words, that he fancied it was an accident on purpose, and that he gave his nephew credit for being more than usually mercenary, as being willing to run bodily risk to ensure his securing the prize. This added to the sting caused by what he believed to be the hopeless nature of his love. It was bitter to feel that he had given his whole heart to one so incomparably and immeasurably his superior—that she, looking down from the height of a heavenly pity, could never either understand or return his affection; but it was still more bitter that he should, by the accident that had opened to him the door of this paradise, that had filled his heart with this priceless love, have laid himself open to the base insinuations of those whose hearts were too sordid to understand his pure devotion, or her immeasurable distance above him. Mr. Vansittart said in his note he would himself call to see his nephew as soon as he should hear that Cecil was strong enough to receive him; but the young man determined he would not let his uncle know of his convalescence until he was well enough to leave The Poplars.

The great fault of his character was, as has been said, a weakness that caused him to think ill of himself and of his own endeavours at all times, and to exalt the performances of others unduly. It was a sweet loving character, with great capabilities for affection, but no energy, no ambition that might urge him on to take the place in the world to which his imaginative powers entitled him.

As an artist, or a poet, under favourable circumstances, he would have been great; as a man of action and purpose, he could never have been distinguished. He recognised this fault in himself clearly, as indeed he saw all his faults, without ever perceiving his counterbalancing merits. As he lay back, listening to his hostess's chat, a dull despair stole over his heart when he thought of his love, and the utter improbability of her ever learning to care for him. He thought of her as he saw her when he opened his eyes that first night, and beheld the white-robed figure standing by his bedside, looking so pitiful and tender. He remembered how she appeared to him like an

angel of light—like a vision from some happier world—and he had hardly dared to breathe, for fear the enchanting apparition should fade and vanish from his sight.

When she turned and left the room, speaking for an instant to the nurse as she went, he understood that it was no unreal form that had charmed his weary senses and beguiled his pain; satisfied that what he had just seen he should see again, he slept peacefully for the first time since he was injured.

After that day, as he slowly recovered, he thought of her constantly, watched for her approach, and centred every feeling of his passionate heart in her. How he should like to paint her portrait, he thought, assuring himself his devotion was merely artistic admiration. In his mind he drew her for every fair and famous woman noted in the history of every age and clime, always ending by deciding that her own age and character suited her best; he could not associate the actions of any other being with her. As he began to get stronger, and knew that before

long he must make an effort to move, and not trespass longer on his entertainers' kindness, he discovered at once and suddenly how deep this ill-fated affection had struck its roots into his heart.

It was not only that he thought of her by night and day, that her strange expressive eyes haunted him with their changeful meaning, that her fair face hovered always before him, with its indescribable smile, and surrounded by its frame of dark hair, like a picture by some rare old Master ; it was not this delight of the senses, exquisite though it was, that rendered the agony of parting so keen and unsupportable ; it was that with every good, and tender, and noble quality with which nature had gifted him, he had endowed her with lavish imagination ; and all that was lofty, and strong, and admirable, in which he was deficient, seemed to him to shine forth in her with greater brilliancy than in any other being he had ever met.

When she sang, it was a pleasure so exquisite as to be pain ; when she talked, with her low, caressing voice, his heart would beat wildly with rapture ; and when the red-brown eyes

rested on his with that indefinable smile, half coaxing, half triumphant, curving her lips, he felt as though he could die happy, were he but assured that strange sphinx-like smile, and the glorious light in the unfathomable eyes, were for him, and him alone.

The feelings that rose so wildly in his heart would at times break bounds, and betray themselves. Weak in all things, he was weaker yet in this, and would, when alone with Mabel, utter words that revealed plainly all the longing and the passion which was so irrepressible and, as he thought, so hopeless. These outbreaks she affected to treat as expressions of gratitude for the little kindnesses she showed him; or at times, when it was impossible to twist his words so as to render such interpretation probable, she would say laughing, though but for her back being always turned to him on these occasions, he might have detected the quivering of her lips,

"Nonsense, you foolish boy! We don't talk of such things here, and I cannot allow it. Mind, if you disobey me," she would add, holding up a warning finger, "I shall leave you in Mrs.

Meek's charge, and never come near you again."

The mere threat of such a fate was sufficient, and the danger would be tided over for a time. Mabel, laughing within herself at his implicit obedience to her word, and believing that she could keep him for ever as submissive as he then was, would think no more of the matter, and see as much of him as before any rash words had crossed his lips to her.

In the meantime, what did she think of him? No sooner had she discovered the state of his feelings with regard to her than she asked herself that question, but could give no answer to it.

"He is certainly wonderfully handsome," she thought, as, sitting a little behind him in the shade of the window-curtain, she scanned his clear-cut features, wide forehead, dark violet eyes, and sweet irresolute mouth, shaded by a heavy dark moustache; "and he loves me as I have never been loved," she mused. "If I would marry him to-morrow, and had nothing in the wide world to call my own, he would take me by the hand and lead me with him as cheer-

fully as though I brought him thousands of dowry. Why cannot I afford to please myself? I know people would say what a fool that girl was to marry the poor soldier she had rescued; but, after all, why should I give my money to a rich man, simply because the world expects it. But then Lord Feversham. If his mother breaks off the match it will be a fine thing to subdue that man, and teach him the chit he used to look down upon may be a prize to be desired. I do believe I could fascinate him if I tried, and then what a sphere would be open to my ambition as his wife! No, it is folly to think of love when so fine a game is opening before me. As for this poor fellow, I fear he will not like it; but he could not expect to win me, and I have been much kinder to him than he had any reason to hope. I wonder how he will take it! I hope I shall be able to get out of the way when he is leaving."

So thinking, she rose, turned the cushions under his weary head, lingered a little as she bent over him, feeling that his dark dreamy eyes were fixed on her, and that he followed every

turn of her graceful figure with undisguised admiration ; but she cared little, while she paid him these attentions, whether the result would be life-long misery, or cynical, callous indifference.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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